From Meaux to Geneva: A Critical Examination of Evangelical Theology in France before Calvin, with Particular Reference to the Homilies Called "Epistles and Gospels for the 52 Sundays of the Year" (1525–31)

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology by Research

at the University of Glasgow

in Partnership with Edinburgh Theological Seminary

Name: STEPHANE SIMONNIN

Registration Number: **xxxxxxxx**

I certify that the thesis presented here for examination for an MTh degree of the University of Glasgow is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it) and that the thesis has not been edited by a third party beyond what is permitted by the University's PGR Code of Practice.

I declare that the thesis does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for another degree.

I declare that this thesis has been produced in accordance with the University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice in Research.

I acknowledge that if any issues are raised regarding good research practice based on review of the thesis, the examination may be postponed pending the outcome of any investigation of the issues.

Stéphane Simonnin, 20th February 2026

Abstract

It is commonly thought that there was no indigenous reforming movement in France during the early phase of the Protestant Reformation and that the growth of the Reformed movement in France from the 1550s onward was essentially due to the vision and theological insights John Calvin and his fellow reformers in French-speaking Switzerland. This view has been recently challenged by new research arguing for the existence of an organised and self-conscious reforming movement in France around the figure of Marguerite de Navarre. In this thesis I argue that this organised reforming movement had not only a coherent reforming program but also benefitted from the distinctive theological insights of the humanist and theologian Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples. Lefèvre's theological views were clearly evangelical, in the early sixteenth century sense of the word, although they were not as far-reaching as the French reformers exiled in Switzerland would have liked. I argue this through an analysis of a series of homilies and other theological documents published in France in 1520s and 1530s by Lefèvre and his circle of clerics and humanists working together in the diocese of Meaux. I conclude by arguing that this original evangelical theology was motivated not so much by fear or philosophical presuppositions but by a clear strategic choice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Whenever one thinks about the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century France, several names immediately come to mind: Jean Calvin, Guillaume Farel, Pierre Viret, Theodore Beza. However, Viret was Swiss and the other three, whilst French, carried out their reforming program in Switzerland. Was the Reformation in France entirely driven by forces from abroad (Wittenberg, Strasbourg, Switzerland) or is there evidence of a home-grown reforming movement? From the evidence available, it would appear that Martin Luther's ideas spread quickly in France. As early as 1519, the French humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples had read Luther's writings and expressed his appreciation for them. In April of that year, Lefèvre asked a German humanist to send his greetings to reformers in Basel (brothers in Christ) and to Luther: "Please send my greetings to those scholarly men in Basel, Dr Humelberg, Capito, Sapidus and all the others whom I love in Christ, and also Luther if you have the chance."[1] On 15 April 1521, the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris issued a decree condemning 104 Lutheran propositions. On 3 August of that same year, a proclamation was made with trumpet in Paris: all booksellers, printers and other persons having Luther's works must hand them over to parliament within a week or pay heavy fine. On 4 November, the fine was replaced by banishment.[2] This is the clear sign that Luther's ideas quickly found an echo in France. But did this lead to the emergence of an indigenous reforming movement?

Most scholars have traditionally argued that it did not. The first three decades of the sixteenth century in France have been famously dismissed as "a long period of splendid religious anarchy," in other words, a series of disconnected initiatives by various individuals, like Bishop Briçonnet, Lefèvre and Marguerite d'Angoulême, who lacked a coherent

[1] Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples to Beatus Rhenanus, 9 April 1519, in A. L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les Pays de Langue Française*, 9 vols. (H. Georg, 1866–97), 1:45: "etiam Luterum si aliquando tibi occurret." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's own.
[2] See Robert J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 159–163.

theological, ecclesiastical vision and leadership.[3] One scholar sums up this view well: "The common feature of these three important figures in the early French Reformation was their consistent unwillingness to recognise or accept that the Reformation was concerned with the making of a new religion and a new church and therefore a refusal to accept leadership and responsibility for any such development."[4]

At the same time, the sudden growth of an indigenous French Reformed church in the 1550s has puzzled historians. No Protestant church was officially established in France before 1555. Yet, in the next seven years, a series of churches sprang up across the country and Protestantism became strong enough to force the royal power to grant the Edict of Nantes in 1598 which granted the French Protestant religious toleration. Calvin and his fellow pastors in Geneva are credited with giving the decisive impulse to that movement from the 1540s onward. It is clear that Calvin's vision was a crucial factor, as demonstrated by both the missionaries sent to France,[5] and the number of French pastors trained as the Geneva academy from the 1550s onward.[6] However, it is equally clear that Reformed churches could not have grown so quickly without a significant number of people sympathetic with Calvin's doctrines, even though they had been driven underground by waves of persecutions since 1539. The German social historian Peter Blickle's remarked that, based on the present state of scholarship, "there are no convincing explanations for Calvin's success in France."[7] Philip Benedict concurs and observes that the French situation before the rise of Reformed churches requires more systematic study.[8]

---

[3] Lucien Febvre, "Une Question Mal Posée: les Origines de la Réforme Française et le Problème Général des Causes de la Réforme," *Revue Historique* 161 (1929): 70: "une longue période de magnifique anarchie religieuse."

[4] Mark Greengrass, *The French Reformation* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 20.

[5] Robert Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming Wars of Religion in France, 1553–1563* (Droz, 1956).

[6] Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors, Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 42–51.

[7] Peter Blickle, "The Popular Reformation," in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Oberman and James D. Tracy, 2 vols. (Brill, 1995), 2:181.

[8] Philip Benedict, "Settlements: France," in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600*, 2:426.

This traditional interpretation of the early French Reformation as a haphazard movement of disconnected individuals was challenged in 2009 by Jonathan Reid in a landmark study of the early Reformation in France.[9] Reid's essential argument is that the early Reformation in France was a much more coherent movement than previously realised and that it was organised around the three key figures mentioned above – Bishop Briçonnet, Lefèvre, and especially the King of France's sister Marguerite d'Angoulême, better known as Marguerite de Navarre from 1527 after she married Henri de Navarre (hence the term "Navarrian network" coined by Reid). When in 1533, on All Saints Day, the rector of the university of Paris Nicholas Cop preached a sermon that was deemed Lutheran in content, Calvin had to flee from Paris with him and it is telling that he first fled to Angoulême (Marguerite's fiefdom) and then found refuge with Marguerite herself at Nérac where he met Lefèvre.[10]

As Reid has shown, the Navarrian network's strategy was to "establish and nourish a sort of catacomb church under the umbrella of the vitiated church militant", in other words, reform the church from the inside, starting at diocesan level, and work its way up to a national level thanks to the support of the king under the influence of his sister.[11] The main means employed to achieve those aims was preaching from the French translation of the Scriptures. Although that strategy ultimately failed to bring about the Reformation that the Navarrian network dreamed about, it would account for the reason why the Reformed church grew quickly in the following decades. It would also explain why, for example, in April 1563, eight French bishops were summoned to Rome by the Roman inquisition on suspicion of

[9] Jonathan Reid, *King's Sister, Queen of Dissent: Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549) and Her Evangelical Network* (Brill, 2009).
[10] On that sermon and debates about its authorship, see Joseph N. Tylenda, "Calvin's First Reformed Sermon? Nicholas Cop's Discourse – 1 November 1533," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38.1 (1975).
[11] Reid, *King's Sister*, 307.

"Calvinism."[12] Reid's argument has also been summarised by another scholar, Michael Bruening in a more recent study.[13]

In this thesis, I argue that the existence of such "Navarrian Network" is not only a historical fact but that such network also had a distinctive theological vision, largely but not exclusively influenced by Lefèvre whose theology displays a mixture of late medieval mysticism and some (but not all) of Luther's key insights. Lefèvre is also known under his Latin name "Jacobus Faber," hence the term of "Fabrisian theology." The argument is based primarily on a critical study of the main theological document produced by the Navarrian network, that is, a series of homilies known as the "Epistles and Gospels for the fifty-two Sundays of the year" (Hereafter "Epistles and Gospels").[14] Such homilies were first published in 1525 under Lefèvre's supervision, and revised with further additions in 1531.

In 1964, Michael A. Screech published a facsimile of the first 1525 edition with a general introduction, bibliographical notes and appendices.[15] Twelve years later, Guy Bedouelle and Franco Giacone produced a critical edition of the homilies based on the 1531 edition and this is the edition on which this study has been carried out.[16] Reid indicated that no detailed theological analysis of those homilies had been done at the time he published his own landmark study on the Navarrian network, and I am not aware of any detailed study in more recent scholarship.[17] Therefore, the study I propose to carry out will add to our understanding of the theological convictions articulated by the Navarrian network in the 1520s and 1530s. It will also illustrate the decisive importance of sermons for the spreading of the new Lutheran

---

[12] Antoine Degert, "Procès des Huit Evêques Francais Suspects de Calvinisme," *Revue des Questions Historiques* 32 (July 1904), quoted by Michael W. Bruening, "Calvin, Farel, Roussel, and the French Nicodemites," in *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, ed. Brian C. Brewer and David M. Whitford (Brill, 2020), 113.
[13] Michael W. Bruening, *Refusing to Kiss the Slipper: Opposition to Calvinism in the Francophone Reformation* (Oxford University Press, 2021).
[14] Original title: "Epîtres et Evangiles pour les Cinquante et Deux Semaines de l'An."
[15] Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples et ses Disciples*, Epistres et Evangiles pour les Cinquante et Deux Sepmaines de l'An*, ed. M.A. Screech (Droz, 1964).
[16] Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, et ses Disciples, *Epistres et Evangiles pour les Cinquante et Deux Dimenches de l'An,* ed. Guy Bedouelle and Franco Giacone (Brill, 1976).
[17]Reid, *King's Sister*, 271.

faith, both the act itself of preaching, and the sermon as a printing product. What one scholar claimed for the German Reformation, namely that it was "an urban event at once literary, technological and oratorical"[18] applies to the French context as well. Similarly, the Epistles and Gospels highlight how, unlike late medieval homilies, sixteenth century Protestant sermons became "embedded in the fabric of routine worship."[19]

I argue that these homilies are theologically significant insofar as they are not merely a transition document but reflect a distinctive Fabrisian theology, which is clearly akin to the theology found in Luther's writings as well as the Genevan theology coming from Farel and Calvin in the 1530s and 1540s but with distinct emphases. After briefly describing the form and content of the Epistles and Gospels, I will show their distinctive theological content through a critical comparison with other documents, which are closely related to them chronologically and are also aimed at the spiritual edification of the laity: popular homilies from the late medieval era and reprinted in France at the same time; Luther's *Advent Postils* of 1522; and some of Guillaume Farel's and Gerard Roussel's French works published in the 1530s and 1540s, as they were both significant members of the Navarrian network. I will also compare the Epistles and Gospels to the relevant section of Lefèvre d'Etaples's commentaries on the gospels and the catholic epistles to trace any possible theological similarity.

[18] A. G. Dickens, quoted by Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 33.
[19] Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15.

Chapter 1: The Epistles and Gospels: their significance

Before analysing the theological content of these homilies in details in the next chapter, I am going to explain their significance in the French context of that time (1520s and 1530s). In this first chapter, I show that the Epistles and Gospels were recognised as significant homilies as soon as they were published and that for two reasons: firstly, because they were closely associated in people's mind with the so-called "Group of Meaux" and, secondly, because they reflected Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples's theological insights and were associated with him and his circle of scholars.

1.1. A key document of the Group of Meaux.

The Epistles and Gospels were initially produced in 1525 by a team of humanists and cleric gathered around Lefèvre in Meaux which historian traditionally refer to as the "Group of Meaux". This group is the most significant indigenous reforming movement in France in the 1520s and the central piece of the "Navarrian Network." Its importance in the history of the French Reformation makes the Epistles and Gospels a fundamental document to analyse as we trace the rise of Reformed theology in France. Therefore, I must explain the origin and significance of this group and how the homilies ended up being preached in Meaux and then disseminated further through printing.

In 1516, Francis I, king of France, had signed the so-called "Concordat of Bologna" with Pope Leo X which gave the French crown significant control over the church in France.[20] Apart from that, the church in France was little different from other Western European countries at the time. It included 114 bishopric and archbishoprics in 14 provinces; about 32,000 parishes, and 13 universities as well as many famous monastic establishments (Cluny,

[20] It allowed the Pope to collect all income from the church in France but the king had the right to tithe the clerics and especially nominate appointments for various benefices (especially bishops and archbishops). See Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior*, 94.

Citeaux etc.)[21] As in all other countries, many people in France felt that church reforms were needed and many agreed with humanists like Erasmus who criticised the church for the incompetence of priests and bishop, their inability to preach and teach and often their corruption. Absenteeism was also a problem, especially for bishops, as senior clergy rarely preached and were often non-resident because they cumulated several offices. Several bishops in the 1510s and 1520s attempted to reform their dioceses but the most famous among those reforming bishops is Guillaume Briçonnet (c.1470 – 1534) bishop of Meaux, a diocese of 230 parishes located 30 miles north-east of Paris. Briçonnet's reforming program in Meaux played a critical role in the early phase of the Reformation in France.[22] He surrounded himself with a group of humanists and clerics to begin an ambitious reform of his diocese. The group of Meaux has left little trace in the French national consciousness but all the main characters involved had an important role in disseminating evangelical ideas throughout the country and in neighbouring countries and they would go on and lead many people to seek personal spiritual renewal and prepare the way for the emergence of Reformed churches.

There are good reasons to believe that the Meaux group had great influence on the religious life of France in the first part of the sixteenth century. The first martyrs of the new "Lutheran" or "evangelical" faith as it was known at the time were burnt in Meaux in 1546. Jean Crespin, in his famous book of martyrs that inspired Foxe, notes: "The faithful gathered sometimes in someone's house, sometimes in a cave or in a vineyard or a word. The one who was most expert in the Holy Scriptures would preach and exhort. That being done, they would all pray together with great courage."[23] Meaux became so well-known that the expression "Lutherans of Meaux" became proverbial in France.[24]

[21] For an overview of the church in France in the early sixteenth century, see Greengrass, *The French Reformation*, 1–20.
[22] For a general introduction of the group of Meaux from a socio-historical viewpoint, see Henry Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: the Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth century France* (Brill, 1986), especially chapter 2 "Popular Roots of the Reformation in Meaux."
[23] Jean Crespin, *Le Livre des Martyrs* (printed 1554), 274, Google Books.
[24] *Histoire Ecclésiastique des Eglises Réformées au Royaume de France*, ed. G. Baum and E. Cunitz, 3 vols. (Fischbacher, 1884), 1:67.

It is also striking that when French Reformed churches appeared in the late 1540s, under the impulse of Calvin and his fellow collaborators in Geneva, the largest church by far was the one in Meaux. Its membership included between 300 and 400 craftsmen. On 8 September 1546, 60 members were arrested during service and 16 of them were burnt on market place a few days later.[25] All this is not surprising when we realise the extent of the evangelising agenda pursued in the 1520s.

Briçonnet was appointed bishop of Meaux in December 1515. In the autumn 1517, he decided to dwell there which was unusual for a bishop, especially one like him who had a prominent diplomatic career. He carried out his first visitation in 1519 when he became aware of the spiritual needs of his diocese. As French historian Lucien Febvre put it, he found flock "starved of divine food and poisoned by the superstitious claptrap of the local Franciscans."[26] Briçonnet sought to recover the ideal of a bishop as a good shepherd whose duties were mainly to feed and guard the flock. In 1518, he had ordered curates unable to preach to read out a chapter of Jean Gerson's catechism during early morning service for parochial servants and also at the high parochial mass. His idea of reform involved both spiritual renewal and feeding the flock with the Word.[27] In his correspondence with Marguerite d'Angoulême between 1521 and 1524, he frequently asked her to use her influence for the gospel in the kingdom. He especially opened his heart to her in a letter dated 22 December 1521:

> At present, the church is arid and dry like a torrent during the period of great southern heat. The heat of avarice, ambition and luxurious life has dried up its vitality, doctrine, and reputation. Such a wind dissipates and dries up all grace. Each one seeks his own profit and honour. God's profit and honour are no longer of any concern. The sheep can well say that they have remained like a land without water, fruitless and dying… We are all earthly when we should be all spirit. And this comes from a lack of the water of evangelical wisdom and doctrine which is not supplied as it should.[28]

[25] Heller, *Conquest of Poverty*, 28.
[26] Lucien Febvre, *Au Coeur Religieux du 16è Siècle* (S.E.V.P.E.N, 1957), 145-61.
[27] See Heather M. Vose, "A Sixteenth Century Assessment of the French Church in the Years 1521-1524 by Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet of Meaux," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 39, no.4 (October 1988).
[28] Guillaume Briçonnet and Marguerite d'Angoulême, *Correspondance (1521–1524)*, ed. Christine Martineau and Michel Veissière, 2 vols. (Droz, 1975), 1:85.

Between 1518 to 1521 he focused on improving the secular clergy more than the regular and he tried to force priests to reside in their parish. By 1521, he had created a system of circuit preachers above the parish priests. In September 1521, Marguerite and Louise of Savoy, the king's mother[29] paid a visit which gives us an idea of the high profile Briçonnet had given to his reforming work in his diocese. Briçonnet had appealed for support from the "royal Trinity" (the king, his mother and sister) and this was a sign that he was at least partly heard.[30]

1.2. A Key document attributed to Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples.

In 1521, Briçonnet took the momentous decision of calling to Meaux Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples to oversee the spiritual formation of the parish clergy and develop their preaching skills. This was a turning point in the Meaux experiment and it is therefore important to clarify the significance of Lefèvre and the close relationship between him and the Epistles and Gospels. Indeed, whilst the Epistles and Gospels were published anonymously, people at the time were in no doubt that they were produced by Lefèvre and his circle in Meaux. Noel Béda, the man in charge of repressing heresy by the University of Paris stated that the homilies were the work of "Jacques Faber and his disciples (*Jacobus Faber et ejus discipuli*) and even the Parliament of Paris issued a condemnation in 1543 against "the fifty-two Sundays composed by Faber Stapulensis."[31]

Lefèvre was perhaps the most famous humanist in Europe after Erasmus.[32] We know very little about the first part of his life. Most scholars agree, on the limited evidence

[29] She was regent of France for one year during Francis's captivity in Spain after the French defeat at Pavia in February 1525.
[30] Vose, "Sixteenth Century Assessment," 517.
[31] M. A. Screech, *Epistres et Evangiles*, 11.
[32] The best overview of Lefèvre's life and achievements remains Guy Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Étaples ou l'Intelligence des Écritures* (Droz, 1976). See also Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre, Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Eerdmans, 1984). Hughes's work is the most detailed study of Lefèvre's theology in English, but his thesis of Lefèvre as a proto-Lutheran is not entirely convincing. See the review of his book by Douglas H. Shantz, "Lefèvre: Pioneer of the Ecclesiastical Renewal in France: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20.2 (November 1985), 263–67.

available, that he was born around 1460 in Étaples in Picardy. Wolfgang Capito describes him as "a pious old man" (*pieux vieillard*) in a letter to Marguerite de Navarre in 1528.[33] Therefore, he must have been around 80 years old, an advanced age for the time, when he died in 1536. He studied in Paris and was ordained priest at an unknown time. He taught philosophy in Paris from 1490 to 1507.

In the first part of his career until about 1507, he dedicated himself to the publication of scholarly editions of ancient Graeco-Roman texts and showed keen interest in Aristotle. Then, in the second period of his life until 1521, he gradually turned his attention to the Bible and began to publish scholarly commentaries and textual critical works for which he was widely admired throughout Europe. He also began to be concerned about the spiritual decay and biblical illiteracy that he observed in both clergy and of the laity and that prompted him to undertake the translation of the Bible in French with a group of collaborators. During that period Lefèvre took part in various controversies between humanists and the church authority about Bible interpretation and textual criticism,[34] and he was increasingly drawn into conflict with the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris for some of his views.[35] Therefore, when Briçonnet called him to Meaux in 1521, Lefèvre was becoming increasingly suspected of heresy.

During the period at Meaux which is of immediate interest to us (1521-1525), Lefèvre's biblical scholarship activity was intense. [36] Before the printing of the Epistles and Gospels in 1525 (the preface was published in April 1524), he had published a commentary on the four Gospels (1522) and one on the Catholic Epistles. It is also during this period that he published

[33] Wolfgang Capito to Marguerite de Navarre, 22 March 1528, in Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 2:120.
[34] Notably, the Magdalen controversy. Richard Cameron, "The Attack on the Biblical Work of Lefèvre d'Etaples (1514-1521)," *Church History* 38 (1969), 9–24.
[35] Often improperly referred to as "the Sorbonne". The Sorbonne was only one of the University's forty "*collèges*" and the Faculty of Theology did not meet there. Other famous colleges included Cardinal Lemoine, Collège de Navarre or Montaigu. See James K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France – The Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500–1543* (Brill, 1985), 3–4.
[36] See Eugene Rice's introduction in *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples and Related Texts*, ed. Eugene Rice (Columbia University Press, 1972).

his landmark translations of the Bible:[37] the New Testament in French (June 1523), printed by Simon de Collines, the psalter in French 1525 (printed by Martin Lempereur), the Old Testament in 1528 and the whole Bible in 1530, both published in Antwerp by Lempereur.[38] Lefèvre's biblical work was cutting edge, like the one carried out by Luther and Tyndale in that it translated the text of Scripture without glosses that were common in the Medieval period. This humanistic approach to the text of Scripture is also reflected in the text of the Epistles and Gospels as we will see below.

Briçonnet and Lefèvre's reforming agenda was centred on the preaching and teaching of Scripture. The centrality of preaching is made clear by Lefèvre in a precious letter from him to Guillaume Farel (who, by then, had left Meaux) on 6 July 1524.[39] Lefèvre writes:

> You would not believe the zeal that God has kindled in the soul of simple people in several places since the publication of the New Testament in French… some tried to ban it thanks to the Parliament's intervention but our most generous king is on Christ's side and He want people in his kingdom to be able to hear the Word of God without hindrance in the language they know. Now, in all the diocese, on feast days and especially Sundays, the gospel and the epistles are read to the people in the vernacular and if the man officiating has something to add, he adds it to one or the other pericope.[40]

Many years later, Guillaume Farel alluded to that opposition which was mainly driven by Jean de Roma, infamous inquisitor of the Waldensians: "I remember once hearing someone talking to a certain Dominican ("Jacobin") named Roma about the gospel. It was when the New Testament on which Lefèvre worked was printed in French and in which it was said that the gospel would now dwell in France and that one would no longer preach men's dreams (*les*

---

[37] See, A. Laune, "Lefèvre d'Etaples et la traduction Francaise de la Bible," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, vol.32 (1895).
[38] Martin Lempereur had taken over the Parisian printing business of his father-in-law Guillaume le Rouge at his death in 1517. When a ban on Bible translation was issued in 1525, he moved to Antwerp.
[39] Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 1:220.
[40] "Vix crederes posteaquam libri gallici Novi Organi emissi sunt, quanto Deus ardore simplicium mentes, aliuot in locis, moveat ad amplxandum verbum suum. Sed juste conque reris, non satis late invulgatos. Nonnulli, authoritate Senatus interveniente prohibere conati sunt. Sed rex generosissimus in hoc Christo patrocinatus adfuit, volens regnum suum kibere, ea lingua qua poterit, audire absque ullo impedimento Dei verbum. Nuc in tota diocese nostra, festis diebus, et maxime die dominica, legitur populo et epistola et evangelium lingua vernacula. Et si paroecus aliquid exhortationis habet, ad epistolam aut evangelium, aut ad utrumque adjicit."

songes des hommes). He (Roma) answered 'I and people like me will raise a crusade and we will throw out the king through his own people if he allows the gospel to be preached.'"[41]

Apart from Lefèvre, Briçonnet gathered around him a team of diverse but gifted individuals, most of whom have been unfairly forgotten today: the most famous is undoubtedly Guillaume Farel who would soon flee to Switzerland and is mainly remembered today for convincing Calvin to stay in Geneva in September 1536. Other significant names included Gerard Roussel, who would become Marguerite's personal preacher before she appointed him bishop of Oloron in Bearn; François Vatable, a Hebrew teacher; Martial Mazurier and Pierre Caroli, both doctors in theology.[42]

The reforming work met with success and it was not long before opposition arose against that program. A first key date is 12 April 1523 when Briçonnet decreed a ban on preachers because he feared some of them were going too far in a "Lutheran" direction. Guillaume Farel was probably one of them and he decided to leave and eventually made his way to Switzerland. However, Lefèvre's publishing and preaching work continued. In June 1523 the French translation of the four gospels in French was published. This is the version used in the Epistles and Gospels but it was condemned by the University of Paris who, by that time, was already suspicious of Lefèvre's activities and theological views.[43] But the turning point that marked the reversal of fortune for the group was Briçonnet's decision to curb theological innovations: Briçonnet had never really adhered to the main tenets of Luther's theology and he was clearly becoming worried that the reforming program and people's increasing challenges to the established church were getting out of hand. In May 1523, Briçonnet had appointed Lefèvre "Vicaire general au spirituel", thereby granting him control over the preaching programs and activities in the diocese. However, on 15 October 1523, he

[41] Guillaume Farel to the Duke of Lorraine, 11 February 1543, Herminjard *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 8:275.
[42] For some biographical information about these characters, see Denis Crouzet, *La Genèse de la Réforme Française* (Armand Colin 1996), 138–140.
[43] See Crouzet, *Réforme Française*, 140.

performed a U-turn and issued synodal decrees condemning Luther and expressly affirming the validity of purgatory and the invocation of the Virgin Mary and the Saints and denouncing his own preachers who taught otherwise:[44]

> Certain people… have dared claiming and preaching, in contempt of the evangelical truth, that purgatory does not exist and that, therefore, we must not pray for the dead nor invoke the most holy virgin Mary and the saints. Since these people were called to share our pastoral burden… we expressly command and exhort each of you to frequently dwell on the subject, to exhort your flock to make pious prayers for the dead, to believe in the existence of purgatory and to invoke the most holy virgin Marty and the saints, often repeating litanies to that end. if some dared to preach the opposite… you must immediately report them to us and ban them from continuing to evangelise the flock.[45]

Owning books written by Luther was now banned in the whole diocese. Lefèvre did not seem to have been discouraged by this reversal. The following month, the whole New Testament in French was published and, in February 1524 he wrote enthusiastically to Farel about the progress in Meaux, as we saw above. Perhaps the best testimony to the progress of Lefèvre's reforming program at Meaux is the one from the anonymous "bourgeois of Paris" who left us a precious diary in which he noted, it would seem rather uncritically, what he heard in the streets of Paris. This 1526 entry confirms that Meaux was infamous and "infested" by Luther's ideas, although the anonymous writer seems to blame Farel.

> On Christmas eve 1526, before the great church of Notre Dame de Paris, a young man of the city of Meaux, bareheaded and holding a lit-up wax torch, publicly confessed and beseeched our Lady for mercy for what he said, following the sect of Luther. And he read out certain books that he had translated from Latin into French, of the said party of Luther, and declared that they were false and damnable. They were burned in his presence… it must be noted that the greatest part of Meaux is infected with the false doctrine of Luther and it was said that a certain Falry (Farel?), priest, was the cause of such confusion.[46]

---

[44] This sudden U-turn has perplexed his contemporaries and historians alike. Some, mainly Roman Catholic, suppose that he sincerely wanted to reform his diocese but was naïve in not seeing the Lutheran tendencies of Lefèvre and his circle. Others (like Beza in his Histoire Ecclesiastique, I,5) claim that Briçonnet caved in to intimidation. In any case, Briçonnet's motivations for his famous U-turn is beyond the scope of this study. What is clear is that the theological convictions of the two men were clearly diverging at this point.

[45] Guillaume Briçonnet to the clergy of his diocese, 15 October 1523, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs,* 1:157.

[46] *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris sous le Règne de François Ier*, published by the Société de l'Histoire de France (Renouard, 1854), 276–277.

The decisive turn against the Group of Meaux was Francis I's defeat at the battle of Pavia in February 1525. Francis was captured and held prisoner in Madrid until March 1526. During his absence, forces hostile to the reforming movement became dominant and the Group of Meaux was disbanded just a few months before the publication of the Epistles and Gospels. Then, on 6 November 1525, the Epistles and Gospels were condemned by the University of Paris. It is sadly ironic that the Epistles and Gospels were published precisely when the reforming effort in Meaux was definitively suppressed.

1.3. Editions and content.

Before analysing the theology of the Epistles and Gospels we need briefly to describe their content and the various editions. They included 126 short homilies first published in 1525 and republished in 1531 and 1542 with various additions. The great popularity of these homilies is confirmed not only by these several enlarged editions but also by their translation into English under the reign of Henry VIII. George Boleyn translated them for his sister Anne in 1532,[47] and many of these homilies were re-translated and published in 1540 by the English lawyer and humanist Richard Taverner,[48] without acknowledgment, under the name "Postils on the Epistles and Gospels".[49]

Three editions are known: the first edition was published by Simon du Bois without indication of place or date but most probably in Paris in 1525. On 6th November 1525, the University of Paris, under the direction of the infamous Noel Beda, condemned 48 heretical statements in the Epistles and Gospels based on a different edition of unknown date and origin. We do not have the text on which the university worked but it was substantially similar to the first edition. Then, in late 1525 or early 1526, another edition was made clandestinely,

[47] Harley manuscript no. 6561 at the British Library.
[48] Guy Bedouelle, "Une Adaptation Anglaise des Epistres et Evangiles de Lefèvre d'Etaples et Ses Disciples," *Bibliotheque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, vol.48, no.3 (1986), 723–734.
[49] Richard Taverner, *Postils and Epistles on the Gospels* (1540), ed. Edward Cardwell (Oxford University Press, 1841), http:www.prdl.org.

after the condemnation, and reprinted in Alençon sometime between 1530 and 1533. A new edition with significant additions and twelve additional homilies was published by the printer Pierre de Vingle in 1531-32, in all probabilities in Lyon. The additions found in this 1531 edition are of two kinds: interpolation in the original homilies and six new homilies. Then, a final one was made by the humanist and printer Etienne Dolet in May 1542, which is the Vingle edition augmented by a preface. On 14 February 1543, the Paris parlement, upon advice of various theologians and following the request of the inquisitor, condemned the "fifty-two Sundays written by Faber Stapulensis" to be burned. This is obviously the Dolet edition.

As we will see, preaching was at the heart of the authors' reforming agenda and these homilies were not simply produced to promote a new evangelical understanding of Scripture and make up for the lack of competent preachers at the time but, as Jonathan Reid has rightly noted, they constituted a pattern to follow to reform dioceses and were also a "codification of long-standing practices and textual substitute for stymied efforts to preach."[50]

The Epistles and Gospels follow the ecclesiastical annual calendar current at the time, starting on the first Sunday of advent and ending in October, on the 25th Sunday after Pentecost. This ecclesiastical calendar had been in force for many centuries,[51] and went unchallenged (even by Luther as we will see below) until that famous Sunday in January 1519 when Zwingli started preaching consecutively through Matthew's gospel.[52] The vast majority of these homilies are meant to be read on a Sunday, not on a feast day except the main feats of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost and a few exception like the birth of the virgin Mary.[53] This calendar is the one we find in other homilies published at the time, including the ones by

[50] Reid, *King's Sister*, 271.
[51] One thinks for instance of the Liber Comicus Toletanus, the oldest lectionary in the Iberian peninsula dating from the 7th or 8th century.
[52] G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 60.
[53] Feast of the nativity of our Lady (homily on Mathew 1).

Nicholas of Lyra translated in French,[54] or Martin Luther's *Advent Postils* of 1522 and augmented in subsequent editions.[55] This means that the texts were not chosen by the authors but were the ones set by the church liturgy, a liturgy that had been well-established for centuries and which was also reflected by the new missal published by Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet in 1518 for the Meaux cathedral.[56] This also means that these homilies were meant to be read to the people gathered in church for mass and not individually at home. The homiletical tone is preserved with the audience addressed as "dear brothers and sisters" or "dear friends". In fact, in Lefèvre's New Testament in French published in 1523, the last 60 pages contained a detailed lectionary table specifying the New Testament readings for all the Sundays and major feast days of the year.[57]

Another distinctive feature of these homilies is their brevity. Most of them do not exceed a couple of pages in the Bedouelle and Giacone edition. This clearly shows that they are intended simply as a basic model or outline to follow on which the preacher can add his own comments. This sets them apart from other homilies of the same period. For example, most of Luther's Advent postils are substantially longer and are clearly complete sermons that are meant to be read out to the congregation. The homilies deal mainly with questions of practical piety but their theological content is significant.

In this first chapter, I have set the Epistles and Gospels in their context, explained their significance in the overall context of the Navarrian network and the first reforming efforts in Meaux in the 1520s. We now turn to a critical exposition of their content to draw out various facets of their distinctive theology.

---

[54] Nicolas de Lyre, *Les Postilles et Expositions des Epistres et Evangiles Dominicales, aveques des Festes Solennelles*, trans. Pierre Desrey (Troyes, 1492 with many reprints).
[55] Martin Luther, *Church Postils (I)*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes and James L. Langebartels, in *Luther's Works*, vol.75 (Concordia Publishing House, 2013).
[56] Michel Veissiere, *L'Evêque Guillaume Briçonnet* (Provins 1986), 310.
[57] "Table pour trouver promptement tant en francais ou latin les evangiles, epistres et lessons continues au nouveau testament qui se disent en l'eglise es dimanches et jours de fete, et aussi es vigils, jeunes et rogations." (Simon de Colines, 1523). See Reid, *King's Sister*, 269.

Chapter 2. The Epistles and Gospels: Theological Analysis.

In this chapter, we look more closely at the theological content of the Epistles and Gospels and argue that they contain distinctive theological insights. This study is important because sermons and homilies are recognised as the main instrument through which the Protestant Reformation was carried out. Not only is it true that "the history of theology is the record of how the church has interpreted the Scriptures,"[58] but all the evidence we possess shows that the first-generation reformers achieved their reforming program mainly through preaching. Scholars estimate that, out of the 1,800 editions of Luther's works printed before 1526, some 40% were published sermons.[59] The same is true of Zwingli and Bullinger in Zurich. Homilies, are therefore an essential genre of writing to assess the theology of the authors of the Epistles and Gospels.

The first question to ask is whether these authors followed previous or contemporary homilies or at least whether any influence from other homilies can be detected. After all, Lefèvre and his disciples were not operating in a vacuum when they published the first edition of the Epistles and Gospels in 1525. There was a long tradition of homilies in vernacular language being copied and, after the invention of the printing press, printed for an increasing readership of clergy and laity. Two series of homilies were popular in France in the early sixteenth century and had been reprinted a few years before the beginning of the Meaux experiment. All these homilies were printed shortly before the Epistles and Gospels and were almost certainly known in Meaux. They were clearly meant to serve the same purpose as the Epistles and Gospels, in other words, educate the laity. However, a brief comparison between them and the Epistles and Gospels reveals a clear shift in hermeneutics and theology which rules out any significant influence. A comparison with Luther's homilies reveals a much closer theological affinities but clear differences as well.

[58] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor, Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings* (Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 5.
[59] Pettegree, *Reformation,* 10–11.

2.1 Comparison with late medieval homilies

Sully's postils

Maurice de Sully (died 1196) was bishop of Paris and is mainly remembered today for initiating the building of Notre Dame Cathedral. His works include many sermons in Latin and in French for the liturgical years which constitutes the earliest known sermons addressed to the laity, as opposed to the ones addressed to monks, like Bernard of Clairvaux's homilies.[60] These sermons were very popular in the late Middle Ages and many manuscripts of them have been preserved. The "*Exposition des Evangiles*" follows the same liturgical years as the Epistles and Gospels and they were printed in Paris in the early 1520s. [61] It is unclear whether they were originally written in Latin and translated into French and whether they were addressed to monks, the clergy or the laity. The homily for the nativity seems to address monks as it lists the various masses sung during the night and day (Sully incudes himself in that – "the three masses that we sing…"[62]) but, on the other hands, other homilies are addressed to the laity.[63] In any case, it is interesting that such homilies would have been translated into French and published several times at the end of the 15th century and beginning of the sixteenth. It seems to point toward a growing desire among the uneducated laity to access edifying material.

Sully's homilies display two characteristics that distinguish them from the Epistles and Gospels and rule out that they may have been an influence of Lefèvre and his disciples: the first is the way they handle Scripture, the second their clear semi-pelagian soteriology.

---

[60] A scholar recently argued that the French sermons may be by Guillaume de Blois (d. 1206): Marie-Madeleine Huchet, "Les Sermons en Français Attribués à Maurice de Sully: la Piste Anglaise," *Romania* 138, no. 3 (2020), 325-359.

[61] Maurice de Sully, *Exposition des Evangiles* (Paris, 1522?). The quotes from Sully sermons are from the 1489 edition (Guillaume Le Rouge, Chablis) at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France available online at https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7300030r?rk=21459;2. There are no page numbers and the number in the following footnotes refer to the page of the PDF document.

[62] Sully, *Expositions*, 21.

[63] "Seigneurs et Dames."

Hermeneutics

The reader who is familiar with the sixteenth century reformers' sermons immediately notice important differences between their approach to Scripture and Sully's approach. This is obvious in the way the Latin text is used and the way in which the interpreters' glosses are incorporated into the text. Scripture is quoted in Latin and only Sully's commentary itself is translated into French. The homily for the first Sunday of advent mentions the two comings (advents) of Christ. It includes a paragraph that is revealing about the medieval confusion between glosses and the text of Scripture itself:

> The first was so marvellous that the virgin who bore him neither lost nor compromised (*blessa*) her virginity, as the Holy Scripture bears witness (*le temoigne*). *Virgo fuit ante partu, virgo in partu, virgo post partu*. She was a virgin before childbearing, during childbearing and after childbearing.[64]

The Latin text is quoted as Scripture while it is clearly a gloss that ended up finding its way into the text of Scripture itself. This is a common feature that is found in all homilies.

The second distinctive feature that radically distinguish Sully's postils from the Epistles and Gospels is its clear semi-pelagian soteriology and fanciful allegorical hermeneutics that betrays a misunderstanding of the flow of redemption history, in stark contrast with the Epistles and Gospels. The allegorical question deserves to be treated separately and it will be in Chapter 3. With regards to soteriology, Sully makes frequent references to the necessity of good works, alms, devotion and the need to deserve eternal life through them. A comparison of two homilies will suffice to make the point:

The first is the homily for the Sunday of circumcision and the text is Christ's circumcision in Luke 2.23. Sully states that spiritual circumcision is something we do ourselves and he equates it with the mortification of sins: "We must not circumcise our flesh

[64] Sully, *Expositions*, 13.

but cut off and remove all manners of sins… if we do so, we will be spiritually circumcised and fulfil the physical circumcision of our Lord."[65]

By contrast, the Epistles and Gospels places the emphases on what Christ has done for us. Christ was circumcised so that we may be circumcised in our heart and live a new life. Among other passages, the homily quotes Gal 6.15: "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but a new creation." Interestingly, the Epistles and Gospels gives a typological interpretation of the 8th day on which Christ was circumcised: this is the day of final judgment, "the great circumcision", when God will clothe his own with immortality and separate them from all sin and evil.[66]

The second homily is the first Sunday after the octave of the epiphany and the text is the wedding at Cana in John's gospel, chapter 2. Sully explains the water and wine allegorically: the water signifies bad Christians "who are cold like water and make those who drink it cold."[67] The wine signifies good Christians because it is usually drunk warm. Good Christians are "warm with God's love" and they warm those who pay attention to their advice. The Lord makes the same miracle every day when he turns cold Christians into warm Christians. Thus, Sully interprets the passage allegorically without any explicit reference to redemption history or to Christ's saving ministry. The Epistles and Gospels is clearly different: after noting in passing that Christ honours the state of marriage by his presence, the miracle is said to refer to the great marriage between Christ and his bride the church which was washed by the blood of Christ, as Paul testifies in Romans 4.25. The six stone water jars for the purification symbolise the fact that no one could join the wedding, that is the communion of the faithful, without first being cleansed. Christ is indeed the true stone from which water gushed out in

[65] "si nous faisons ainsi, nous serons circoncis spirituellement, ainsi comment nous signifie la corporelle circumcision de notre Seigneur." Sully, *Exposition*, 22.
[66] Homily for the Sunday of circumcision, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 48–49.
[67] Sully, *Expositions*, 26.

the desert according to Paul in 1 Co 10.14. There follows a heart-warming exhortation which is typical of the style of the Epistles and Gospels:

> So it is my brothers, that if you place your hope in this mercy, you will be purified and therefore found worthy of being numbered among the faithful Christians. If then you notice that the wine, that is the pure doctrine and fervour, fails, pray humbly as per the example of the blessed virgin Mary to Jesus, with full confidence, that he may be pleased to act so that the water, that is cold doctrines, impure and human, and weak love and weak understanding of the Holy Scripture, may be turned into the wine of spiritual doctrine, of flaming love, without adding the water of human reasoning (*sens humain*).[68]

Interestingly, we find a very similar typology in Lefèvre's commentary on the gospels (1523): Christ being the true stone, the wine being spiritual doctrine as opposed to the water of "insipid doctrines and cold devotions."[69] We will deal below with the subject of typology and allegory more in detail. Allegorical interpretations are fairly common in the Epistles and Gospels, just as in Sully and Lyra and also Luther's homilies.

These couple of examples give an idea of the wide gap between Sully's homilies and Epistles and Gospels. Whilst the latter operate in a long homiletical tradition represented by Sully's homilies, they bear the mark of the humanistic approach to the text of Scripture and new soteriological doctrines deriving from Luther's fundamental insights.

Lyra's postils

We now turn to Nicholas of Lyra's postils. Lyra (c.1270 – 1349) wrote popular homilies in Latin which were translated into French by the late medieval humanist Pierre Desrey under the title "*Postilles et Exposition des Epitres et Evangiles Dominicales, avec Fetes Solennelles.*" They were first printed in 1492 and reprinted many times afterwards.[70] Nicholas of Lyra was a far more prominent figure than Sully in medieval Europe. He was the most

[68] First Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 66.
[69] Quoted in *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 67.
[70] Nicolas de Lyre, *Postilles et Expositions,* trans. Pierre Desrey. The quotes below are taken from the 1497 edition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France available online at https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8710392v?rk=42918;4. There are no page numbers and the number in the following footnotes refer to the page of the PDF document.

respected Bible exegete of his day and his commentary (Postilla) on the whole Bible was known throughout Europe. He was read and frequently quoted by Martin Luther.[71]

At first sight, it would seem more likely that these homilies may have influenced Lefèvre. Lyra was famous for adopting a more literal approach to Scriptural exegesis and famously asserted that the literal sense was the foundational one and that "a mystical interpretation that deviates from the literal sense is to be judged inappropriate and inadequate."[72] As one recent scholar notes, his approach to Scriptural interpretation "was shortly going to become the mainstay of an entire cultural movement of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century."[73] Lyra was therefore a thoughtful exegete and Desrey clearly had the same purpose as Lefèvre and his circle in publishing them in French: not simply training the clergy but also the education – one could almost say the "evangelisation" – of the whole people. Distinguishing between Lyra's thought and Desrey's is somewhat difficult because Desrey refers to Lyra in the third person[74] and his is more a paraphrase than a translation. For the purpose of this brief analysis, we will assume that the content is from Lyra.

Again, even a cursory analysis of those homilies reveals a profoundly different mindset and theology from the Epistles and Gospels. An obvious difference if that Lyra quotes the church Fathers abundantly, especially Ambrose, Augustine and Chrysostom, as well as Rabanus, unlike the Epistles and Gospels which contain only eight brief patristic quotes, all of them in the 1531 additions.[75]

However, hermeneutical and theological differences are more significant. A few brief examples will be enough to make the point. In the homily for the first Sunday of advent, on Romans 13.11-14 ("the hour has come for you to wake from sleep"). Paul's exhortation is

[71] For a brief introduction to Lyra's hermeneutics and exegesis, see James George Kiecker, *Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra on the Song of Songs* (Marquette University Press, 1998). For a fuller study, see *Nicholas of Lyra, The Senses of Scripture*, ed. Philip Dray and Leslie Smith (Brill, 2000).
[72] Cited in Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, transl. James O. Duke, 4 vols. (Brill, 2010), 2:250.
[73]Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Baylor University Press, 2017), 202.
[74] "selon maître Nicole de Lyre."
[75] See *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, Appendix D, 403.

interpreted by Lyra and Desrey as an exhortation to perform "works of love"[76] and the point is confirmed by quoting Gregory the Great in Latin, in the midst of the French text: "Nam ait Gregori (caritas operator magna)".[77] Conversely, the Epistles and Gospels, whilst recognising that Paul is clearly talking about getting rid of sin, goes further and applies the day to the new covenant inaugurated by the coming of Christ in whom all our sins are forgiven if we have faith.[78]

The second homily on the first Sunday of Advent on Matthew 11.1-9 (the entry in Jerusalem) reveals interesting differences both at a hermeneutical and theological level. Both homilies teach the allegorical meaning of the two donkeys that is common in medieval theology: the donkey on which Christ is seated symbolises the people of Israel under the yoke of the law whereas the foal that has never been mounted represents the Gentiles who have never been under the Mosaic law. Lyra even specifies that this allegorical interpretation is the reason why this passage is read not only on Palm Sunday but also at the time of the advent: because it celebrates the coming of Christ to subdue both peoples. However, Lyra goes on to say Peter was one of the two disciples sent to untie the donkey (which is not mentioned in Matthew) and he makes a striking theological application:

> St Peter was one of the two disciples sent to fetch this donkey. Now Peter represents the sacerdotal state to whom our Lord gave power to untie, that is to absolve the poor sinner through confession… the Lord told them 'untie the donkey' by which we understand that, after we are untied from our sin by the priest, our Lord Jesus is ready to receive us in his service…[79]

Again, we will come back to the allegorical question in Chapter 3 but this passage is revealing about Lyra's classic medieval idea about the central role of the church in bestowing God's grace to sinners. Such statement is absent from the Epistles and Gospels and is entirely alien to their whole ethos as they emphasise the importance of personal faith and

[76] "oeuvres de charité."
[77] Lyra, *Postilles*, 6.
[78] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 2. This statement is censured by the university of Paris.
[79] Lyra, *Postilles*, 8.

conspicuously play down the role of the institutional church. In the same way, Lyra goes on to affirm that by coming into the world, Christ liberated the Old Testament fathers from limbo; an idea which is absent from the Epistles and Gospels.

The last brief example comes from the first homily on the octave of the Epiphany, based on Romans 12.11-5. Commenting on v.3b, "to think about yourselves with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned…", Lyra states that Christ attributes different gifts of grace "according to what man merits by the measure of his faith."[80] Conversely, the same homily in the Epistle and Gospels states: "Do not attribute anything to yourself through pride but humbly consider that what you have, you have it by the goodness of God in Jesus Christ and not through your merit but by faith..."[81]

This statement is one of the 48 censored by the University of Paris on the ground that it insinuates that man has no merit before God and is not rewarded by God for good works and it "stems from the workshop of the Manichees and the Lutheran and is heretical."[82]

These few examples make it clear that the Epistles and Gospels, whilst parts of the tradition of late medieval homilies in vernacular language have taken a very different course from Sully's and Lyra's homilies and reflect very different hermeneutical and theological influences; they represent a significant departure from medieval hermeneutics and semi-pelagian theology.

2.2 Critical analysis of the 48 heretical propositions:

After comparing the Epistles and Gospels with the most popular sets of late medieval homilies republished in the early sixteenth century, we now turn to a closer theological analysis of the content Epistles and Gospels themselves. The theological content of these homilies can be analysed from various angles but the most fruitful way to identify the

[80] "Selon ce que l'homme mérite par la mesure de sa foi." Lyra, *Postilles*, 55.
[81] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 57.
[82] "Ex officina Manichaei et Lutheri elicitor, et est haeretica."

distinctive theological traits of these homilies is to focus on the 48 statements that were officially censured by the University of Paris. As we saw above, on 5th November 1525, the University of Paris published a list of 48 statements that were officially condemned as false or heretical with a brief explanation in the margin. These 48 propositions and the censure from the university have been published separately by M. A. Screech in his introduction to the fac-simile of the 1525 edition and they have also been inserted as footnotes in Bedouelle and Giacone's critical edition.[83] This is on these 48 propositions that we now turn our attention and we argue that they exhibit some distinctive Lutheran emphases.

The few modern scholars who have looked at the censured propositions in detail – most of them Roman Catholic - argue that the censors of the University of Paris under the leadership of Noel Beda were particularly obtuse and hostile but it is clear that most of the propositions they censure were definitely evangelical in content or in tone. Beda himself was quite clear about it. Talking about Lefèvre and Erasmus (he bundles them together!) the following year, he says this:

> While they may not have sunk down openly into the heresies of Mani, Arius, Sabellius and Donatus, so too there is little doubt that they think and assert themselves in depraved manner along with Pietro Valdo, John Wycliffe, Marsilius of Padua and others of the second rung of clear-cut heretics on faith, merits, free will, church councils, penance and many other issues. They are sacrilegious in their views on the veneration of the saints, the sacred constitution and rites of the church, the rules of the Fathers, and on many others.[84]

Almost all 48 propositions deemed heretical are condemned for one of two reasons: downplaying the importance of human teaching and tradition with regard to Scripture and downplaying the value of human efforts and the intercession of the saints for salvation. In other words, they recognised in them the teaching that is the most readily associated with the Protestant Reformation and people's mind: the superiority of Scripture over church traditions

[83] For the French text of the 48 propositions and the Latin text of the university's censure, see M. A. Screech, *Epistres et Evangiles*, Appendix B, 41-51.
[84] Noel Béda, *Preface to his Annotations on the Works of Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples and Erasmus*, Translated by Mark Crane, in "A Scholastic Response to Biblical Humanism: Noel Béda against Lefèvre d'Etaples and Erasmus (1526)," *Humanistica Lovaniensa*, vol.59 (2010), 67–68.

and the decisive role of faith in salvation. Other parts of the Epistles and Gospels that have not been censured also go into the same direction.

Scripture and tradition

We find clear and repeated assertions, regularly censored, that only the word of God should be trusted, and not human traditions. About 12 out of the 48 propositions are censured on that ground. These statements are expressed in various ways. There are a few generic statements about the unique value of Scripture which, by themselves, would not be a clear affirmation of the Sola Scriptura principle. A typical example is: "The spirit of God came, sent by Jesus Christ… the great light came to bring this holy testimony. Then God alone is exalted and the creature humiliated. Then God's word is everything and other words are nothing."[85]

This is the kind of censored statements for which the University of Paris has been accused of obtuse hostility by Catholic scholars.[86] However, its censors recognised that there was something "Lutheran" in the view of Scripture expressed in those homilies. In fact, many statements are much more explicit. For example, the idea that we need to believe the Word according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not human intelligence, and that only the Word of God can truly feed us: "Listen friends, what is the food of the soul? Surely, it is the Word of God which alone can give you salvation and eternal life."[87]

This statement is condemned by the University of Paris for implying that nothing saves us except the "bare text of Scripture" (*Scriptura nudum textum*). Or, again the fact that one can only enter the kingdom of heaven through Christ's Word and we must leave aside the doctrines of men: "Do not listen to any doctrine to enter the kingdom of God except the voice and the doctrine of Jesus Christ who is the only true shepherd… leave all other doctrines and

[85] Sunday after the octave of Ascension day, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 207-208.
[86] For example, Veissière takes the view that "a dispassionate reading of the homilies allows to conclude that the doctrine is for the most part acceptable from a Roman Catholic point of view." Veissière, *Briçonnet*, 312.
[87] Homily for the 1st Sunday of Lent, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 122.

trust that men may propose; let us follow only one pastor and let us have only one doctor, Jesus Christ…"[88]

Interestingly, this teaching is censured by the University on the ground that it is not only against Scripture but also nullifies any hope we may have in the intercession of the saints.[89] This also means that Christians must believe the Word according to the Spirit and not their own opinion. In the homily for St John's Day, no less than three statements are condemned. Commenting on Peter's question to Christ in John 21 about what will happen to John, the homily states: "Therefore, I must not preoccupy myself[90] how God deals with St Peter, St Paul or St John and all the others and to what degree of glory, gifts and pre-eminence he gave them. It is enough to follow Jesus Christ." It then continues: "We must believe the word of God simply, according to the intelligence of God's Spirit and not ours and we must not mix our intelligence into it or our foolish opinions[91]… we must believe simply the word of God according to the Spirit and not according to the presumption of our intelligence."[92]

Again, the University of Paris condemns these statements as "reckless and impious" and "detracts from the honour due to the Saints."[93] The homily adds that even the apostle Paul himself does not want us to think that he or the other apostles are anything but servants of Christ; therefore, anyone preaching a gospel that is not strictly what Christ preached should be ignored.[94] The University censured comments that, by saying that nothing should be preached which is not expressly contained in Scripture is false, schismatic, blasphemous and injurious to the church.

Finally, another corollary of that teaching is the clear downplaying of human knowledge and traditions. One homily declares abruptly that human knowledge is really more

[88] Tuesday of Pentecost, Epistres et Evangiles, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 224.
[89] "nullamque spem reponendam esse in Sanctis."
[90] "Il ne me doit chaloir."
[91] "n'y devons ajouter nos intelligences et en faire folles opinions."
[92] Homily for St John's Day, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 37.
[93] "temeraria et impia… honori Sanctorum detrahit."
[94] Homily for 3rd Sunday of Advent, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 14.

"presumption than knowledge." This is censured as a "Hussite and Lutheran" heresy by the University that obviously had clear ideas about where that teaching was supposed to come.[95] A similar statement in another homily, to the effect that human doctrines cannot feed the soul is condemned by the university as "impudent, ignorant and smelling of heresy (*sapit heresim*).[96]

Taken in isolation, most of these statements could mean nothing more than we must place our trust in God's Word and not in human wisdom; a statement often found in Scripture itself.[97] However, as the University of Paris correctly perceived, when read in their immediate context, these statements clearly go further: they invite the hearers to acquire a "Berean mind" in their approach to Scripture,[98] and clearly set out their prerogative to interpret Scripture against the authority of the church hierarchy to do so and to provide spiritual help through the intercession of the saints. This leads us to consider the other series of statements condemned by the Parisian censors.

The role of faith

The other main category of statements censured by the University of Paris focus on the exclusive role of faith in salvation. There are repeated statements to the effect that salvation is only by faith, that no merit avail for anything and that we can derive to help from suffering or the prayers of the saints. The corollary of that last point is that feast days are as insignificant as the saints themselves. Mary is also conspicuous by her absence.

The homily on the gospel of the 24th Sunday after Pentecost contains the clearest, and one would say, most Lutheran, exposition of evangelical soteriology. It is worth quoting the paragraph in full:

> But this faith is a living faith that works through love. A sun that does not enlighten nor warm up does not vivify; neither does faith without love (*charité*). If

[95] 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 241.
[96] 25th Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 363.
[97] Proverbs 3.5, Isaiah 2.22 etc.
[98] Acts 17.11.

> you have this faith – that Christ died for you to cancel your sins – so it is; your sins are cancelled. His death is yours and the merit of his death yours. And if you also believe that he was raised for your justification, you are truly justified by faith.[99]

This passage is remarkable for a number of reasons: it begins with an allusion to Paul's statement in Galatians 5.6 ("faith working through love") that could be understood according to the medieval understanding of faith as a "habitus of the mind"[100] that must be supplemented by love to be salvific.[101] This understanding was denounced by Luther[102] but later confirmed by the Council of Trent.[103] This statement could be understood in that sense and the authors of these homilies do not express themselves with the precision that one may find in Luther's lectures or Calvin's Institutes but the rest of the paragraph suggest that they intend more than simply love playing a part in our justification. In fact, the homily goes on with what is a strikingly clear statement of the substitutionary atonement of Christ: If I believe Christ died for my sins, "so it is"; his death and merit are mine. This paragraph was censured by the University of Paris that commented: "This proposition, attributing all merits to faith or belief in the Passion, resurrection, and other mysteries of Christ, and rejecting any penance is the damned Lutheran heresy."[104]

This is confirmed by another homily in which two statements on the same points are censored: "Faith, hope and love are not separated in this world" and "Faith without love is not true faith."[105] Both statements are condemned as "contrary to the apostolic text and therefore heretical."[106] It is somewhat surprising that the University of Paris would condemn two

[99] Homily on Matthew 9.18-26, 24th Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 359.
[100] Aquinas, *Summa Teologica*, II.2. Q.4.3.
[101] The famous "fides formata caritate" formula.
[102] See Luther on Galatians 5.6, LW27:28-30.
[103] "For faith, unless hope and charity be added thereto, neither unites man perfectly with Christ, nor make him a living member of his body." Session 6, chapter 7.
[104] Haec propositio, omne meritum tribuens fidei seu credulitati Passionis, Resurrectionis et aliorum Mysteriorum Christi et omnes rejiciens poenitentiam, haeresis est Lutheri damnata.
[105] Homily for the Sunday of the Quinquagesima, Bedouelle and Giacone, 113.
[106] "Textui apostolico contrariaest, et ideo haeretica."

statements which, on the face of it, seem innocuous. The reason is surely that the censors understood that those statements were intended in a different sense from the medieval one.

Several other statements are censored for the same reason in the Epistles and Gospels. By way of example, we may mention "In everything, God only requires faith" condemned as "manifestly heretical"[107] or, perhaps even more clearly, "Jesus Christ died for our sins says St Paul, therefore we no longer owe anything for our sins since Jesus Christ has atoned and paid for us."[108]

This emphasis on Sola Fide entails a rejection of the works or intercession of others, whether in the church militant or triumphant, as is made clear in other homilies. For example, one homily asserts: "Whoever expects true salvation from works or from any creature and not through Jesus Christ alone tells Jesus that he is anathema."[109] Unsurprisingly, this comment is censored as heretical because it condemned the merit of good works and intercessory prayers (from the saints).[110] Another significant statement is found in the homily on the 13th Sunday after Pentecost on Galatians 3.16-22. The homily could not state more clearly the fact that faith in Christ excludes the recourse to saints: "In this epistle, Saint Paul wants us to understand that grace and blessing are not given by saints[111] [the 1531 edition adds "patriarch nor prophet"] not even by observing the law, but only by the faith that we have in Jesus Christ who alone satisfied and fulfilled the law for us."[112] Not surprisingly, this statement is censured like the one above. Immediately after this statement, the homily explains the role of the law in terms which are impeccably Lutheran: "But one will say: what is the use of the law since it does not justify us? Saint Paul answers: it was given because of transgressions. It was given… to let the people know about its transgressions and sins; by such law we are all humbled and

[107] "Manifeste haeretica." Homily for Pentecost Monday, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 217.
[108] "*satisfait et paye pour nous*." Homily for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 285.
[109] Homily for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 279.
[110] "sanctorum suffragia"
[111] "par sainct ne saincte"
[112] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 297.

declared under sin so that, being so humiliated, the good promise may be given us by Jesus Christ, to us and to those who believe and trust [*croyent et se fient*] in him."[113]

A significant corollary of this theology as it is expressed in the Epistles and Gospels is clear rejection of purgatory. Two homilies are particularly significant. In the homily on St Stephen's day (the day after Christmas), the author stresses the fact that when Stephen was lapidated, he invoked Christ and adds: "While they lapidated him, he was not invoking angels, nor Moses nor Abraham , Isaac or Jacob nor any of the prophets but only Jesus Christ; in this, it teaches us that we must invoke God and our Lord Jesus Christ and not an angel or another creature." Again, the University of Paris was clear about the outcome: "this proposition detracts from the veneration of the holy mother of God, angels and holy relics and is heretical."[114]

The second homily is even more striking because it deals with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 which was a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of purgatory. The teaching from this homily is significant:

> He (the rich man) thought Abraham could do something and that he would answer his prayer but Abraham refers to the Word of God (not the rich man for whom it was too late but for those still in this world). For this is where we must go, this is the Word through which God wants to save us by giving us faith, and not through those who have departed from this world. And even if they came back to us we should not believe them… he says "they have moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." We now have the great and true Moses who is our lord Jesus Christ… we will not go to a place of torment with the rich… but we will go with Abraham, not in his bosom like those wating for the coming of the messiah, but with Jesus Christ in God's kingdom where there is endless joy and glory.[115]

The first part of that statement was condemned for denying the intercession of the saints in glory as "impious, heretical, Waldensian, Cathar and Bohemian."[116]

---

[113] Ibid.
[114] "Sanctae dei genetrices, angelorum reliquorumque sanctorum veneration impie derogate, et est haeretica."
[115] Homily for the first Sunday after Pentecost, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 232.
[116] "Impia haeresis est Valdesium, Catharorum et Bohemorum."

2.3 Other noteworthy theological aspects.

As we have shown above, the Epistles and Gospels are markedly different from the medieval homilies, both in their hermeneutical presupposition, their theology and what they try to achieve with the congregation for which they are written. The emphasis on the supremacy of the Word over and against human traditions, including church tradition and teaching, and an exclusive reliance on faith as the means of salvation as opposed to personal merits and achievements are the two salient theological emphases of the Epistles and Gospels. These two emphasises converge into a view of the Christian faith that focuses on the personal relationship of the believer with God, mediated more through the preaching of Scripture than the sacraments. Christians are exhorted in these homilies very much on an individual basis and their personal piety is the centre of the attention. This is also shown by the author(s)' reluctance to expound complex theological doctrines. This is seen for example in the homily for Christmas day on the first fourteen verses of John's gospel. The homily invites the hearer to marvel about the "high and sublime" message of these verses which deal first with Christ's eternal generation and then his temporal one. However, the rest of the homily simply runs through the first fourteen verses without attempting to expound the doctrine of God or the person of Christ contained in them.[117]

But the most striking theological characteristics of the Epistles and Gospels deriving from that individualistic view of the gospel is what they do not mention: There is nothing in the Epistles and Gospels about the Church as an institution and its sacramental system. The Pope is never mentioned nor alluded to, neither are cardinals and bishops. The only reference is to the "pastors", the good ones who feed the flock with the Word and the others. The only definition of the church that one finds in the Epistles and Gospels is in the homily for the 1st Sunday of the octave for the epiphany, about the wedding at Cana and it is the universal

[117] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 28.

church: "… the universal church, in other word the gathering of Christians who have ever been, are and will be, after that holy Friday when they were washed by the Lord of the blessed Jesus and united to him by true justification on the day of his resurrection."[118]

The Virgin Mary is never mentioned except in some additions in the later 1531 edition and even in those additions she is described more as a "sister in Christ" and praised more for her faith than for the virgin birth.[119] Saints are not mentioned either and the University of Paris saw clearly that the repeated references to the illusory help people seek outside of Christ and of his Word are an indirect indictment to the veneration of the Saints. Purgatory is never mentioned, even when anyone would have expected a reference to it. Lefèvre's views may well have evolved in the early 1520s as we will see below.

The sacraments are never mentioned, especially the mass. This is perhaps the most puzzling paradox of all: the Epistles and Gospels were written to be read during mass so their very existence entails the performing of masses. The mass is the prime target of the Protestant attacks from Luther's Babylonian Captivity of the church in 1520 and is perceived as the root of everything that is wrong with the Roman church theology. Guillaume Farel, in a famous letter written in 1530 in which he describes his conversion to the evangelical faith, identifies the rejection of the mass as the watershed moment in his life.[120] After saying that he accepted the doctrine of salvation by faith alone and rejected the intercession of the saints, he added: "Nevertheless, there still remained a big root of Satan's spell [in Farel's heart] in that I could not reject the mass… I was for a long time blinded by its seduction because of the adoration of the bread and wine and the fact that I believed the body and blood of Christ were in them instead of bread and wine."[121]

---

[118] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 66.
[119] Homily for the feast of the nativity of our Lady, *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 366–371.
[120] Guillaume Farel, *Epistre à tous Seigneurs*, in *Du Vrai Usage de la Croix de Jesus Christ de Guillaume Farel, Suivi de Divers Ecrits du Même Auteur*, ed. Jules-Guillaume Fick (Geneva 1865).
[121] Ibid., p. 173.

Yet, the Epistles and Gospels are silent on mass and we will explain this later when we reflect on the general theology and agenda of the Navarrian network in chapter 5. In spite of this, the Epistles and Gospels' theology is clearly evangelical in several key aspects, they mark a departure from medieval homilies and were clearly seen as such at the time from the clear condemnation of 48 statements in them. The other obvious candidate as a documents that could have influenced the Epistles and Gospels is Luther's Advent postils.

2.4 Comparison with Martin Luther's Advent Postils (1522).

If there is one set of homilies that we would assume influenced Lefèvre and his circles when writing the Epistles and Gospels, it must be Luther's "Advent postils" of 1522. The word "postil"[122] used by Luther had been used since the Middle Ages to refer to sermons on the annually recurring epistle and gospel of the calendar year. This is exactly what these homilies are, like the Epistles and Gospels. Luther composed the advent postils in Latin and, immediately afterward, composed similar ones in German (Christmas postils).[123] He wrote them for the same reason as the Meaux circle did the Epistles and Gospels: the perceived need for theologically sound sermons at a time when too many priests were untrained in Scripture and unable to preach them.[124] It is not by chance that both Luther and Lefèvre undertook to translate the New Testament in their respective native language and then use it in the context of a preaching ministry. As their name indicates, the Advent postils, only cover the four Sundays before Christmas and therefore correspond to the first eight homilies in the Epistles and Gospels.

Surprisingly, Reid indicates in his study that a comparison between them and the Epistles and Gospels had yet to be undertaken.[125] Several reasons make it likely that Lefèvre's

[122] From the Latin "post illa verba" meaning "after these words," formula used to introduce a commentary after reading a portion of Scripture.
[123] LW75, introduction, p.xiv-xv.
[124] The Advent Postils went through several editions during his lifetime.
[125] Reid, *King's Sister*, 272.

circles would have copied Luther. Firstly, we saw that Luther's ideas and writings spread rapidly in France in the early 1520s and that Lefèvre was aware of his writing and well-disposed towards him. Secondly, we know that the Meaux network was following closely the events in Germany and Switzerland and wanted to appropriate the fruits of the Reformation there. In July 1524, Lefèvre thanked Farel (who had already left for Switzerland), Oecolampadius and Pellikan for the books they had sent him and expressed his hope that "Christ would make himself known in France as fully as he had in the rest of Europe."[126] In his study, Reid shows how widely the group of Meaux read for inspiration and guidance. Their correspondence sheds light on the books they were seeking and reading, including books by Erasmus, Farel, Francois Lambert, Bugenhagen, Luther, Melanchthon and Oecolampadius (10 titles mentioned).[127] It is quite possible that they took the idea of vernacular scripture reading from Johann Oecolampadius.[128] Indeed, the Basel reformer had recently published a sermon and a letter arguing that it was fitting for a reading of the New Testament epistles and Gospel to be done in the common language during mass.[129] Thirdly, it would seem that Luther's homilies were translated in Latin by Martin Bucer precisely to encourage French evangelicals. That translation was published for the first time in February 1525 with a dedication from Bucer to "the evangelical brothers dispersed in France."[130]

Despite all this, Luther's homilies are surprisingly different both in form and content, they are not quoted and there is no trace of direct influence on the Epistles and Gospels. The most immediately obvious difference is the length: Luther's homilies are generally much longer and much more detailed and they are clearly full sermons that Luther himself wrote

[126] Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 1:221.
[127] Reid, *King's Sister,* 269 and appendix B III.
[128] Lefèvre to Farel, 6 July 1524, in Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 1:221. See also Reid, *King's Sister*, 270.
[129] Johann Oecolampadius, *Quod Expediat Epistolae et Evangelii Lectionem in Missa Vernaculo Sermone Plebe Promulgari* (June 1522).
[130] *Primus tomus Enarrationum in Epistolas et Evangelia, ut vulgo vocant, lectiones illas, que in Miβa festis diebus ex historiis Evangelicis et scriptis apostolicis solent recitari. Autore Martin Luthero* (Strasbourg 1 February 1525). Bucer's dedicatory letter is dated 13 January 1525.

down and must have preached. By contrast, the Epistles and Gospels are short documents and only constitute a basic model of exposition of scripture. But more substantial differences can be noted.

Firstly, the Epistles and Gospels unmistakably displays Lefèvre's humanistic concern for the correctness of the text, a concern notably absent in Luther. Two clues make this obvious: In the homily for the 4th Sunday of advent, based on John 1.19-28, when commenting about v.28 ("these things took place in Bethania"), the authors of the Epistles and Gospels point out that the name "Bethania" found in Erasmus's New Testament is a corrupted reading and the correct reading is "Bethabara". Surprisingly, this attracts the ire of the university of Paris that censures the statement as "scandalous and not to be preached to the people."[131] By contrast, Luther shows no awareness or no interest for textual criticism and simply remarks that "the evangelist John describes this testimony so carefully that he even mentions the place where it happened."[132]

The second clue comes from the first homily for St John's Day. This homily is not part of Luther's 1522 Advent postil but was printed shortly after in the winter postils. The two set passages for the liturgical reading on St John's Day are Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sirach) 15.1-6 and John 21.19-24. Remarkably, Luther composed a homily on the Ecclesiasticus passage even though it is an Old Testament apocrypha book. He simply mentioned at the end that "this epistle does not disagree with the gospel."[133] On the contrary, the Epistles and Gospels omit the passage entirely and only provide one homily for that day leaving a glaring blank in the list of homilies.

In additions to the diverging interest on textual criticism questions, there are interesting theological and hermeneutical differences. To be sure, we find many commonalities between the two sets of homilies: the same concern to teach the basic truth of the gospel to ordinary

[131] "Scandalosa et populo non praedicanda."
[132] LW75:183.
[133] LW75:351.

church goers, and an emphasis on "Sola Scriptura" and "Sola Fide." For example, the second homily for advent on Romans 13.11-14 displays the same emphasis on the good news of the Gospel. Paul's reference to the need to wake up from sleep because salvation is nearer than when we first believe is interpreted as the faithful preaching of the gospel that dissipates the night of error into which the church was plunged until then. As one would expect, the tone of the Epistles and Gospels is more irenic and less idiosyncratic than Luther's; no specific mention of "philosophers and heathens" as in Luther, no allusion to Aristotle, but the same contrast between mere human doctrines and the pure teaching of Scripture. Both stress the supreme importance of Scripture but we do not find trace in the Epistles and Gospels of that very peculiar idea of Luther, namely that only the Old Testament is strictly speaking "Scripture" because the new was meant to be proclaimed more than written down. This is an idea that we find more than once in Luther, from the very first homily of advent:

> It is the intention of all the apostles and evangelists to chase and drive us into the Old Testament, which alone is what they call "Holy Scripture". For the New Testament by its nature was supposed to be only physical, living words and not writing. For that reasons, Christ did not write anything but gave the command to preach and promote the gospel orally, which previously had been hidden in the Scriptures.[134]

We find the same emphasis on righteousness being granted by God and not stemming from anything that is in us, although Luther offers more nuanced teaching on the value of good works. For example, this statement in the first advent postil on Mt 21 (the entry in Jerusalem) is typical of Luther:

> We must do good works but our confidence must not be built on them, but on Christ's work. We should not attack sin, death, and hell with our works, but send them away from us to the righteous saviour, to the king of Zion who rides on the donkey. He knows how to treat sin, death, and hell: he kills sin, chokes death, ad devours hell.[135]

[134] LW75:39. Later in the same homily, Luther adds that the church is a "mouth house", not a "pen house." (LW75:51, fn. 72). The same curious idea can be found in Luther's sermons on 1 Peter (LW30:3,19).
[135] LW75:48.

This should not be surprising because Luther scholars have shown that, contrary to popular opinion, good works have always been important for Luther insofar as they confirm the reality of faith. The fact we love others bear witness that we trust in God's mercy which is the essence of faith.[136] Or, as another scholar vividly puts it, faith fulfils the first commandment to put our trust in God and "it is that work of God that makes human works good."[137]

Conversely, the Epistles and Gospels contain frequent generic emphasis on the need for humility and brotherly love but there is a clear, less nuanced teaching about the supreme value of faith and the pointlessness of works, as we saw above in the 48 censored propositions. This is probably partly because the Epistles and Gospels are much shorter and less nuanced but also, as we will see below, an aspect of Lefèvre's theology which strongly emphases the imitation of Christ's virtues, in particular humility.

However, there are different emphases between the two sets of homilies and especially a significant theological difference that make it clear that the Epistles and Gospels are not simply a summary of Luther's advent postils. This key difference is Luther's Augustinian anthropology and his clear emphasis on the devastating effect of original sin on man's freewill, an emphasis which is absent or muted in the Epistles and Gospels. This is significant when we think about the date: 1525. Luther published his response to Erasmus's Diatribe on freewill in December 1525, just a few weeks after the first edition of the Epistles and homilies. The issue of freewill was at the forefront of theological discussions also in France. Marguerite de Navarre makes an interesting reference in passing to this topic in a series of poems published in that same year:

[136] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology, its Historical and Systematic Development* (Fortress Press, 2011), 265.
[137] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology, a Contemporary Interpretation*, transl. Thomas H. Trapp (Eerdmans, 2003), 283.

> I beg you that these fractious debates
> About freewill and liberty be left
> To the great scholars…
> Be assured that you are free indeed
> If you have the grace and love of God.[138]

These verses are interesting for two reasons: firstly, they confirm that the freewill controversy was very topical in France at the time. Secondly, Marguerite condemns such controversies as pointless and unhelpful for the ordinary believer who had better focus on Christ's love for him. Again, the Epistles and Gospels are clearly on Marguerite's side on this issue. This is once again obvious from the first advent homily on Mt 21. Commenting on Mt 21.5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, behold your king is coming to you", Luther comments that we do not come to Christ or fetch him because he is too high for us; on the contrary, he is the one who comes down. This leads to a denunciation of the "the shameful and unchristian teaching about freewill"[139] after which Luther adds:

> If you work and live without God you must remain in sin no matter what you do and it is all sin what you have done out of your own freewill. For if out of your own freewill you could not sin or could do what pleases God, what would you need Christ for? He would be a fool to shed Holy Spirit blood for your sin if you by yourself were so free and mighty that you could do something which is not sin.[140]

This thought is entirely absent from the Epistles and Gospels that simply focus on the Father's mercy in sending his own son and includes an exhortation to put off the old man and, through an allegorical reading of the palm branches cut by the people, to cut off branches from the tree of concupiscence and throw them under the feet of the saviour's donkey.

The absence of this Augustinian anthropology in the Epistles and Gospels is also visible in exhortations based on Scriptural passages that would naturally lead preachers to make such emphasis. For example, in the homily for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost, based on Romans 8.12-7, the Epistles and Gospels comment that "by the sin and disobedience of one man,

[138] Pierre Jourda, "Marguerite de Navarre, Dialogue en Forme de Vision Nocturne," in *Revue du Seizième siècle* (T.13, 1926), verses 961-969.
[139] Later editions remove "unchristian". LW75:33.
[140] LW75:34.

Adam, the whole world was submitted to the inevitability of death and slavery to sin but by the obedience of one, Jesus Christ, we are all regenerated, an delivered from sin"[141] This is followed by an exhortation to serve Christ in newness of life, submitting to Christ who leads us by his spirit and mortifying the flesh. Despite a generic mention of the "slavery to sin", no explicit conclusion is drawn about the absence of freewill of unregenerate men.

This brief comparison of a few advent homilies shows that, whilst the Epistles and Gospels are clearly much closer to Luther's advent postils than previous medieval homilies, and whilst the general theology behind them is similar in many ways, there are significant differences of emphasis between the two showing that Lefèvre and his circle did not simply reproduce Luther's homilies but were either independent from them or filtered them of some of their content because of a different situation and theological agenda.

2.5 Comparison with Lefèvre's Commentaries.

The next logical focus in our investigation of the Epistles and Gospels' theology is the question of their similarity with Lefèvre's theology and reforming agenda as far as we can discern them in his writings. Screech who believes the Epistles and Gospels were mainly the works of Lefèvre's disciples notes that "Lefèvre… has given the work of his four disciples the mark of his personality, his style and his doctrine."[142]

Two main writings are relevant in that respect: the first are his prefatory epistles to the various biblical publication printed in the 1520s, in particular the prefaces to the translation of the New Testament and the whole Bible and his commentaries; the second are the commentaries themselves.[143] Of particular relevance are his commentaries to the four gospels

[141] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 266.
[142] Creech, *Epistre et Evangiles*, 12.
[143] The prefaces have been helpfully collected by Eugene Rice in his volume *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples and Related Texts* (Columbia University Press, 1972).

published in Basel in 1523,[144] and his commentary on the Catholic epistles published in 1524.[145] His commentary on Paul's epistles, whilst valuable, is less directly relevant because it was written in 1512,[146] thirteen years before the Epistles and Gospels, and Lefèvre's theology evolved significantly in the meantime. Although the 1512 commentaries contains a few ideas that we also find emphasised in the Epistles and Gospels and his later commentaries, in particular the need for every believer to be united to Christ and the centrality of Scripture in the believer's life, it does not articulate the central place of faith in salvation as the Epistles and Gospels do,[147] and it clearly displays a semi-pelagian view of original sin that denies that the guilt for Adam's sin is imputed to mankind.[148] What does a comparison between these works and the Epistles and Gospels reveal? In summary, they reveal an unquestionably similar theology and concern whilst there are differences in method and emphasis.

Starting with the prefaces, we clearly find a very strong emphasis on the primacy of Scripture over all other human teachings and traditions. This clearly is a central idea in Lefèvre's theology and the one that drove him to translate Scripture in French in the first place. For example, in the Prefatory epistles to the French translation of the four gospels in 1523 we find statements that are very similar to the one found in the Epistles and Gospels. The following citation is typical in that regard:

> The New Testament is the book of life and the only rule for Christians… we must return to him (Christ) leaving aside any other foolish trust in any creature and human traditions which cannot save and following only the word of God which is spirit and life… Let us know that men and their doctrines are nothing if they are not corroborated and confirmed by the Word of God. But Jesus Christ is everything; he is all man and all divine; and a man is nothing if not in him and man's word is nothing if not in his word.[149]

---

[144] *Commentarii initiatorii in quatuor evangelia*, Basel 1523 (available at www.prdl.org).
[145] *Commentarii in Epistolas catholicas*, Antwerp 1524 (available at www.prdl.org).
[146] *Commentarii in Epistolas Pauli*, Paris 1512 (available at www.prdl.org).
[147] Richard Stauffer, *Interprètes de la Bible, Etudes sur les Réformateurs du XVIe siècle* (Beauchesne, 1980), 18–19.
[148] Irena Backus, "Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples: a Humanist or a Reformist View of Paul and His Theology?" in *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation,* ed. R. Ward Holder (Brill, 2009), 61–90.
[149] Preface to the French translation of the Gospels (1523) in *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples*, ed. Eugene Rice, 453–454. Also, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs,* 1:135.

We find the same idea in his Commentary on the four gospels where Lefèvre distinguishes between the Word of God and the biblical authors themselves and the commentators. In the preface, written in Meaux soon after his arrival (1522), Lefèvre makes this striking statement:

> Therefore, let the divine prevail and the human be cast aside, which do not have the light from the Gospel, even if they profess wisdom and piety; indeed, faith and the pure worship of God are produced by the word of God in which undoubtedly only the truth, which is the Word of God, saves.[150]

Later on in the same preface, he warns that he may have added certain ideas that are his in the commentary but he does not take glory in it. On the contrary, they must be distinguished from the Scriptural text.[151]

In the preface to the translation of the four gospel in French, written in Meaux in June 1523, Lefèvre insists clearly on the supremacy of Scripture over the church and as unique guide for Christian. After mentioning that he translated the gospels so that the "simple members of the body of Christ may be certain about the evangelical truth" and that the New Testament is "the book of life and only rule of Christians", Lefèvre exhorts the church to reform itself, observing that the Lord has sent the Turkish menace over western Europe like he once sent Babylon to Israel "to correct the faults of Christendom which are very great and that we may turn to him, leaving behind any foolish trust in any creature."[152] He then concludes: "Let us know that men and their doctrine are nothing unless they are corroborated and confirmed by the word of God."[153] He later adds that he avoided paraphrase at all costs, so as not to "mix the word of man with the word of God."[154] The same ideas are repeated incessantly and several later prefaces to the translation of the rest in of the New Testament in the psalms during the Meaux years (1523-25).

---

[150] "vincant itaque divina facessant humana quae ex evangelio lumen non habent etsi sapientam et pietatem prae se ferant; nam hic de verbo dei de fide de puro dei cultu agitatur sermo in quo nimirum sola veritas quae est verbum dei salvat."
[151] Rice, *Prefatory Epistles,* 439.
[152] Rice, *Prefatory Epistles,* 450.
[153] Rice, *Prefatory Epistles,* 452.
[154] Rice, *Prefatory Epistles,* 453.

What about Lefèvre's commentaries? Can we detect the same hand as the one behind the Epistles and Gospels? Certain similar interpretations lead to a positive response although we can see that Lefèvre frequently proposes a more complex theological or allegorical interpretation that is left out by the Epistles and Gospels that target a lay audience, not a scholarly one. Particularly significant in that regards are the homilies on the gospels since Lefèvre's commentary on the four gospels was written just a few years before. Bedouelle and Giacone points to a few examples in their introduction and others can be found.[155] Let us mention a few:

For example, in the episode of Jesus left behind in the temple in the homily for the octave of the epiphany, the homily states that Mary was aware that her Son was God and that, therefore, she was not overly troubled by his disappearance; she was only blaming herself for her negligence! Says Lefèvre: "Now my friends, think how troubled the blessed virgin Mary was at that time, not that she feared some evil may have befallen Jesus whom she knew was God, but rather that he may have been offended by her negligence."[156] This unusual idea can also be found exactly in the same terms in Lefèvre's commentary. Lefèvre adds a reference to the Song of Songs 5.8[157] which is absent from the homily, probably because deemed too allegorical to be easily understood. Lefèvre adds that Mary and Joseph are a type of the contemplative and active life respectively, an idea that is typical of late medieval allegorical thought but remote from the simplicity of the Epistles and Gospels.

Similarly, in homily for the feast of the purification talking about the purification rites mentioned by Luke immediately before the temple episode, we find the idea that Mary and Joseph were not technically speaking subject to the letter of the law because they were virgin.[158] The idea can also be found in Lefèvre's commentary on the same episode but it is

[155] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, xxx-xxxiv.
[156] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 60.
[157] "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love." (ESV)
[158] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 96.

striking how, in the homily, Christ's role is more prominent. Whilst Lefèvre says in his commentary Mary and Jesus comply with the law for everyone's sanctification, the homily only says that of Jesus. The 1531 editions emphasises the point by adding that Christ circumcised "not to be sanctified but to sanctify all those present."[159] Lefèvre's commentary adds the interesting idea that Mary brings two doves – one for sin although she is sinless - because Christ himself is the lamb required by the law.

Another striking example of similarity that leaves no doubt that Lefèvre's commentaries inspired the authors of Epistles and Gospels working under his supervision is the parable of the pharisee and the publican. The difference between the two is explained in the same unusual terms: the pharisee is justified but the publican is justified *more* than him.[160] In his commentary, Lefèvre states that: "For the pharisee went home justified with his own justice; but the publican justified with the justification of God and through grace. And he was more justified insofar as God's justice is greater than man's. And why is this? Because that one humiliated himself whereas he exalted himself."[161] Similarly, the homily for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost states: "Our Lord tells us what happened to both, that is, one, the Publican, went back more justified than the other."[162]

Certain details also show that the author(s) of the Epistles and Gospels drew directly from Lefèvre's commentaries. In the homily for the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost on the parable of the wedding guests in Mt 22, the homily interprets the sending of an army in the parable (v.7) as the army of Vespasian and Titus destroying Jerusalem. This unusual reference is also found in Lefèvre's commentary.[163] Another clear example is in the homily for Easter

[159] Ibid.
[160] Lefèvre plays on the Latin from the Vulgate translation of Luke 18.14 "justificatus ab illo."
[161] "Nam pharisaeus descendit iustitia sua iustus: publianus uero iustificatione dei and gratia iustus: and ideo magis iustificatus illo, quanto iustitia dei maior est iustitia hominis. Et cur hoc: quia iste se humiliauit, ille autem se exaltauit."
[162] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 288.
[163] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 203.

Monday which notes that, according to Jerome, Emmaus was later renamed Nicopolis; a detail also mentioned in Lefèvre's commentary.[164]

These are only a limited sets of examples but they tend to indicate that the author or authors of the Epistles and Gospels, whilst not Lefèvre himself, have used his commentaries and are close to his theology and his main themes. However, some differences are also apparent. I mentioned above the reticence to allegorise the text. Whilst there are allegories in the Epistles and Gospels as we saw above, they are more limited and more easily comprehensible than the ones found in Lefèvre's commentaries. In addition to the reference to the Song of Songs mentioned above, we can also mention the homily of the eighth Sunday after Pentecost on Mt 7.15ff which does not mention Lefèvre's allegorical interpretation of the grapes and figs as doctrine and good works (feeding the poor).[165]

Sometimes the Epistles and Gospels tone down the sacramentalism that is still present in Lefèvre's commentaries the homily on the purification of the ten lepers in Lk 17.11-19[166] the homily tones down Lefèvre's mention of the sacrament of penance (he uses the term "satisfaction"). The homily limits itself to the idea that the priest has the power to discern, judge and absolve. More significantly, in the homily on the rich man and Lazarus in Lk 16.19-31, which, as we saw above, was a locus classicus for the doctrine of Purgatory, Lefèvre explicitly mentions that the rich man is indeed in purgatory whilst the homily is conspicuously silent on the subject.[167] This is especially striking given the amount of space Lefèvre dedicates to this point and his rather tortuous demonstration: the fact that the rich man expresses the desire to send Lazarus to his five brothers shows that "he seems to wish good things"[168] which suggests he is not in Hell. Lefèvre also latches on the Vulgate text of 2

[164] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 164.
[165] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 269.
[166] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 306.
[167] Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Etaples*, 202.
[168] "cum bonum optare videatur."

Samuel 12.13[169] (*Dominus transtulit peccatum tuum*) to find an analogy of purgatory in the forgiveness of David followed by the death of the child: the ambiguous verb "*transfero*" can mean either to "pass over" or to "carry over". David's sin is "carried over" so that whilst he is forgiven, there is still a punishment to bear. There is something strangely "Protestant" in his commentary on this passage in the fact that he limits himself to exegeting scripture with no reference whatsoever to the abundant tradition on purgatory while at the same time still being rooted in the medieval tradition of that doctrine. Conversely, the Epistles and Gospels homily on that same passage is not only entirely silent on the doctrine but also focuses on Abraham's response pointing out the great abyss between Lazarus and the rich man which demonstrates that: "We may not obtain by prayer, neither for ourselves, not for others, nor for the living nor for the dead. Abraham points us back to the word of God. For it is there that we must go; it is through this word that God wants to save us by giving us faith, not through those who gone from this world."[170]

The contrast is unmistakable and can be explained either by Lefèvre changing his mind in the few years between the two or through the fact the authors of the Epistles and Gospels have gone further away than him in an evangelical direction on this point.

What about Lefèvre's commentaries on the epistles since half the Epistles and Gospels homilies are on an epistle? The comparison with his commentary on Paul's epistles is perhaps not so pertinent as the commentary dates back to 1512 and Lefèvre's theology has clearly evolved considerably in the meantime. The commentary on the catholic epistles is far more relevant as they are closer in time. Despite the small number of homilies on catholic epistles, we can see a similar approach to these texts, in particular the same kind of theological exegesis without moralising applications. Two verses in James (1.18 and 1.27) contain the

[169] "The Lord has put away your sin." (ESV).
[170] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 232.

same focus on the need for spiritual regeneration as the homilies.[171] A more striking similarity is the exegesis of 1 John 5.4-10, incorporating the *comma Johanneum* which Lefèvre never disputed. The meditation on how the Spirit, water, and blood bear witness to Christ's divinity on earth is identical in Lefèvre's commentary and in the homily on the Sunday of Quasimodo:[172] The spirit is Christ's spirit that he entrusts to the Father; the water with which he was baptised and the water and blood that he shed on the cross.

This comparison between the Epistles and Gospels and a series of other homilies and Lefèvre's commentaries reveals something distinctively evangelical about its hermeneutics, exegesis and doctrinal focus whilst remaining distinct from Luther's doctrinal insights in various ways. It is typical of the early sixteenth century exegesis which aimed at retrieving the simple text of scripture, rid of its glosses, but also reflects confidence in the ability of lay hearers to appropriate the doctrines of Scripture and understand them without any reference to patristic or scholastic categories. In effect, this approach to the Bible, is an example of what the American scholar David C. Steinmetz describes as the "Protestant exegetical optimism". This optimism which he attributes to Luther and Calvin seems even more applicable to Lefèvre and his network: "Both Luther and Calvin reflect the exegetical optimism which marked early Protestantism. For a brief period of time, Protestants thought it would be possible to write a theology which was wholly biblical and excluded all philosophical and speculative questions. It became clear within a decade that such hope was not well-founded. Nevertheless, Protestants remained optimistic about the clarity of Scripture and the simplicity and persuasive power of the truth which it contained."[173]

[171] Homily for the fourth Sunday after Easter, in *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 187, and fifth Sunday after Easter, in *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 192.
[172] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 172.
[173] David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Baker Academic, 2002), 96.

As we continue our enquiry in the theological peculiarities of 1520s and 1530s French reformed writers, we must analyse the numerous additions to the Epistles and Gospels that appear in the 1531 edition.

2.6 The 1531 variants and additions.

As mentioned above, the Epistles and Gospels were republished by Pierre de Vingle in 1531 in Lyon with a certain number of additions. Most additions consist in additional wording inserted in the 1525 text and there are also six entirely new homilies. The author of these additions is unknown. Bedouelle and Giacone, in their critical edition of the Epistles and Gospels rule out the authorship of Lefèvre on the ground that, by that time, he had decided to remain largely silent or dedicate himself to commentaries. They suggest Gerard Roussel as a possible author, given the theological flavour of these additions.[174] The authorship is not in itself of primary significance for the purpose of this study although we will come back briefly to this issue below. A large number of homilies have been reprinted unchanged and many changes consists simply in the addition of Scripture references. However, some of those additions are intriguing and theologically significant. The striking thing about those additions is that, on a superficial reading, they contain signs of a return to a more traditional understanding of Scripture and the church but, on closer examination, they show signs of a shift in a more Lutheran direction.

A. Apparently more catholic.

All the eight patristic quotes are to be found in the 1531 additions. All of them are from Augustine except one from Jerome. These quotes are not theologically significant but seem to indicate major awareness of patristic theology and a shift from a basic exposition of the text towards an exposition that is more rooted in the tradition, not just Scripture. Lefèvre and his

[174] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, xxxiv-xli.

circle were surely familiar with the Church Fathers and the absence of reference to them in the 1525 homilies must be deliberate: the desire to return to the text of Scripture itself without any reference to external material, contrary to the medieval homilies as we saw above. More intriguing is the various allusions to liturgical texts and the additions of supplementary homilies for liturgical feasts: three homilies for the "common of saints" (*commune sanctorum*) for evangelists, martyrs and confessors, two homilies for all saints days and for the dedication and one for the "nativity of Our Lady". This is surprising when we think that a couple of statements in the 1525 homily for the first Sunday after Pentecost (on 1 John 4.8-21) had been censored by the university of Paris for lack of respect for the feast of the Trinity in the liturgical calendar. The censured passage was:

> This day is the first Sunday after Pentecost and its octave.[175] Although it is the first day of the Trinity, we must not consider it as a particular feast for the Trinity, as we have been accustomed to create separate feast days, for this is a universal feast. Therefore, we will not expound the epistle in view of the trinity but as for a specific Sunday and a universal feast before God. And whoever has understanding, no feast is specific but all are universal and from God. God is universal and if feast are from God, they are from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[176]

Lefèvre and his circle clearly intend nothing more than the Triune nature of God is a universal truth that must be part of the Christian's faith on a daily basis and does not need to be celebrated on a specific Sunday. In fact, the homily continues: "This feast must be constantly celebrated in our heart, whether we apply it to the Sunday when one must go to church to hear God's Word, and the holy communion, or uniting ourselves to God by Jesus Christ."[177]

Further, the authors indicate that they do not say all this "out of contention" but simply to exhort Christians to serve God and celebrate him about all things. However, the University of Paris condemns the first two statements as "false, alien to the piety of the faithful and repugnant to the determinations of the church which has defined a specific solemnities for the

[175] The octave of Pentecost was an eight-day period between Pentecost Sunday and Holy Trinity Sunday.
[176] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 227.
[177] Ibid.

Holy Trinity and for the saints under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[178] Again, whilst there is nothing openly Lutheran in that 1525 homily, the University censors detected, probably rightly, a general tendency to downgrade the importance of the church as an institution and the church solemnities and to put premium on the individual believer's experiential piety which they saw as a sign of Lutheran influence. However, despite this superficial appearance, the additions of homilies for various feasts in the 1531 homilies does not constitute any return toward a more medieval theology on the part of the author. In fact, the opposite can be said.

B. Yet more Protestant.

Many of 1531 variants go into a more Protestant direction. First of all, the additional homilies for feasts and solemnities contain nothing that contradicts the theology of the 1525 edition, on the contrary. Secondly, the 1531 edition repeatedly downgrades the role of the church hierarchy and emphasising the need for personal faith. This is often done simply through brief phrases added to the 1525 homily to make the point more vigorously. The homily for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost is a good example. This is a homily on the episode of the ten lepers in Luke 17.11-19 which we mentioned above in relation to Lefèvre's commentary. An extract of the 1525 homily with the 1531 additions in brackets makes it clear. This is the paragraph where the authors compare the coming of the ten lepers to Christ to the coming of the penitent sinner to the priest:

> After we are presented to the priests who have power and authority from God to discern and judge [provided they proceed] according to Scripture and, according to Scripture, absolve [not in accordance to their own will and whim] as St Paul absolves. But after we are absolved… we must beware of being ungrateful… but rather be like the Samaritan leper… so that the Lord may tell us 'arise and go, your faith has saved you' [not your works, not the holiness of priests, not their sacrifices, not the offers and oblations made in the temple, but your faith].[179]

[178] "Utraque harum propositionum falsa est, a pietate fidelium alienate Ecclesiae determination repugnans, quae particulares beatae Trinitatis et Sanctorum fieri solemnitates, Spiritui sancto suggerente, definivit."
[179] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 306.

Moreover, the one homily dedicated to the virgin Mary is particularly striking, both for what is affirms and what it fails to say. The "homily for the feast of the nativity of our lady"[180] is significantly longer than most of the 1525 homilies and is striking in that it focuses entirely on Mary and spends a great deal of time exalting her in the highest terms but, at the same time, it downgrades her to the status of a sister in Christ. After stating that Adam, Abel, Noah and the patriarchs found comfort in the promise of a saviour made to Eve in Genesis 3 which implied that a woman had to come to give birth to that seed, the homily continues:

> This woman for so long prophesied and foreknown is in truth the virgin immaculate[181] trough God almighty, as by the means of the Holy Spirit, vessel of God chosen above all, who produced this powerful spiritual king for whose coming and conception she was temple, dwelling, tabernacle and precious house of all divinity. O creature full of benediction, full of God, full of sanctification! Holy and immaculate virginity, how could I sufficiently praise you when the sovereign deity loved you which such singular love, filled with faith and adorned with all grace so that you are truly mother of your God, your creator, saviour and redeemer.[182]

Significantly, the passage for the homily is the genealogy of Christ in Matthew chapter 1 and the homily makes the obvious point that Scripture makes no mention of the birth of Mary. All the blessings she receives are attributed to her faith in God's promises. This exalted language in itself is by no means incompatible with Protestant theology. All the magisterial reformers showed great devotion and admiration for the person of Mary and Luther speaks about her in similarly glowing terms in his commentary on the Magnificat, and even declares her sinless:

> The tender mother of Christ teaches us with her words and by the example of her experience how to know, love and praise God. For… she boasts, with heart leaping for joy and praising God , that he regarded her despite her low estate and nothingness[183]… Mary also freely ascribes all of God's grace, not to her merit. For though she was without sin, yet that grace was far too great for her to deserve it in any way.[184]

[180] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 366–371.
[181] Old French "intémerée."
[182] Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Etaples*, 368.
[183] LW21:301.
[184] LW21:327.

Conversely, what follows in that 1531 homily is a downgrade of Mary to the level of a sister in Christ that would surely have been condemned by the Paris University examiners, had it been part of the 1525 edition that they examined. Indeed, the author goes on to state that Mary is mainly to be admired for her humble faith and it quotes Augustine's memorable thought that Mary was "happier to conceive God in her heart by faith than to conceive him bodily in her womb."[185] Whilst she was daughter of David in the flesh, she the daughter of God "by faith, in Spirit and in truth, regenerated and begotten by his mercy in his holy word." Significantly, the author observes that we have no genealogy of Mary because it is the one Christ that truly matters. The homily continues with this striking paragraph:

> Therefore, we cannot speak much about her bodily nativity without guessing, which must not be done in preaching. Moreover, it would be of no value to us. For nothing will ever profit us, or her, except being born of God in the Spirit by Jesus Christ who made and prepared his mother as he wished… therefore, all her honour, grace and holiness must be attributed to her son, her maker. He who does otherwise blasphemes, is ignorant and ungrateful and displeases both the mother and the child, committing a monstrous theft[186] since he attributes the honour due to the creator to the creature.[187]

The homily concludes by observing that Mary displayed the virtues of faith, love and hope, followed by a surprising and seemingly pointless allegory whereby Abraham, Isaac and Jacob symbolise respectively the three traditional theological virtues. The author concludes that these three virtues are summarised by Paul in Romans 5: being justified by faith we have peace with God through Jesus Christ and we hold on fast to this hope knowing that God's love is poured out in our heart. This downgrade is further confirmed by a short addition in the homily on Luke 11.14-28 for the third Sunday of Lent. Commenting on the woman in the crowd shouting to Christ "blessed is the womb that bore you etc." The 1522 homily simply observes that all blessings flow from listening to God's word and keep it. The 1531 adds: "For

[185] Allusion to Augustine's sermon 72/A7.
[186] "Prodigieuse rapine."
[187] Bedouelle, *Lefèvre d'Etaples*, 370.

the holiness of the virgin Mary and of all the angels and saints in paradise will not profit us for anything if the word of God is not duly honoured, heard, kept and observed by us."[188]

However, the most decisive clue of a shift toward a more uncompromising Lutheran or Swiss Reformed theology is the striking additions stressing God's sovereignty in salvation and the corruption of human nature and freewill. Several clear examples of this evolution can be found. In the very first homily on Ro 13.11-14, for the first Sunday of advent, the 1522 homily interprets Paul's exhortation to wake up from sleep as an exhortation to leave aside the sin that induces eternal death. We saw above that one statement was condemned by the University of Paris, namely the idea that everything is forgiven us if only we have faith. However, the 1522 homily never explicitly spell out where this faith comes from. The 1531 adds a reference to the "deadly night of error and infidelity" which is being driven away by the light of the gospel and, significantly adds a paragraph stating man's inability to believe unless this is granted by God, an idea that is never explicitly found in the 1522 homilies: "To firmly believe that one is saved and justified before God without merit is such a great thing that it is the work not of nature but a very special gift of God which he only grants his friends."[189]

This is even more explicit in an addition to the homily on Mt 8.1-13 for the 2nd Sunday after the octave of the epiphany. Commenting on Christ's words that several with some from east and west will sit in the kingdom with Abraham but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out, the 1531 adds that the sons of the kingdom being thrown out refers not to those in the heavenly kingdom but the worldly kingdom "of Satan, the Antichrist and the son of perdition", because "As the will of God according to his election remains forever unchangeable, all those who are preordained to salvation will infallibly attain it."[190]

[188] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 135.
[189] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 2.
[190] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 73.

Other, briefer additions go into the same direction. We can mention for instance the 2nd homily for the 2nd Sunday of advent in which the 1525 exhortation to believe is interrupted by a 1531 interpolation stating that "it is not given to the unjust and wretched reprobate to believe firmly..."[191]

Some 1531 additions make more explicit the exclusive role of faith in salvation that is already expressed in the 1522 homilies. The way some of these additions are inserted shows a deliberate intention to stress a doctrinal truth. For example, in the second homily for St Stephen's day, the day after Christmas, the 1522 homily exalts the faith of martyrs like Stephen and alludes to the words of Christ whereby all the blood shed by the martyrs "from Abel the just to Zechariah" will be vindicated. The 1531 edition includes an addition immediately after "Abel the just" adding that Abel was just by faith which is the only thing that justifies us before God as it is written in Habakkuk 2.4.[192] Similarly, in the second homily for the Sunday of the Septuagesima (9th Sunday before Easter), contains a statement in the 1522 censored by the university of Paris whereby we are saved by God without any merit on our part. The 1531 contains a lengthy addition reiterating the point at greater length and adding that "God, by his holy will, does whatever he likes with his creatures according to his good pleasure."[193] But the most significant addition is undoubtedly the one in the homily on Luke 18.9-14 for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost. It is a lengthy addition on the difference between the pharisee and the publican that stresses the depravity of the human heart and clearly echoes Luther's theology of the cross and distinction between visible and invisible righteousness. It is worth quoting in full:

> O what a great difference there is between the judgment of God and of men; for undoubtedly this Pharisee would have been the mirror and exemplary pattern of all goodness, holiness and perfection before the world, and this publican would be detested and rejected by all; but before God, something very different happened.

[191] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 11.
[192] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 34. The first homily for the circumcision on Titus 2.11-15 contains a 1531 addition specifying that faith without good works is dead.
[193] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 102–103.

> Not that there is anything wrong about thanking God, paying one's tithes, fasting often, not being adulterous, liar, deceiver and thief etc. But all those works that seemed to good outside were poisoned by a secret pride hidden in the heart according to which God judges. Conversely, all the evil of the publican was removed and cancelled because he humiliated himself profoundly before God, in faith and trust, admitting himself to be a sinner - as he was in reality - for no creature will be justified before God.[194]

Finally, some additions stress the right of free examination of Scripture which is clearly a conviction that will become associated with Protestantism. One example in the 2nd homily for Pentecost Tuesday on John 10.1-10 is particularly interesting. In 1525, the University of Paris had censured three statements stating that one could only enter the kingdom of God by believing in Christ and his word and that, therefore, no doctrine of men should be believed. The second statement specified that Christian should not hold to any doctrine if not the doctrine and the voice of Jesus Christ; the third that Christians should follow only one pastor and leave all other doctrines of men. These three statements seem perfectly orthodox at first sight but the Paris university censored them because it perceived an implied downgrade of the authority of the church. It censored them for teaching that "the sole text of Scripture" (*Scipturae scrae nudum textum*) was sufficient. Interestingly, after the second censored statement, the 1531 adds this: "… whose voice we know and hear if we are of his flock. We will never receive another one as it says in this passage in which irrevocable authority is given to each Christian to judge and think whether anything commanded or proposed complies with the gospel or not…"[195] The same idea is repeated with great force and solemnity in the homily for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost: "Whether all creatures of the world like it or not, irrevocable authority and power is bestowed on each Christian to judge any human doctrine, any ordinance and commandment, any decree or statutes of men, whether they conform to God's word or not."[196]

[194] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 288.
[195] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 224.
[196] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 269–270.

Let us note to conclude two great new homilies added in the 1531, not for Sundays but for feast day: All saints day[197] and the common of the evangelists.[198] The first one, contains a stirring commentary on the beatitudes that repeatedly stresses the fact that rue righteousness is not a question of works but of attitude and internal transformation. The author picks on Augustine's definition of poverty in Spirit and adds a more concrete touch to it.

> By poor in spirit, St Augustine means those who do not have a proud and puffed-up heart nor a proud and arrogant spirit like those who put themselves first out of pride. We do not disagree with such exposition. Nonetheless, by that expression we understand those who are voluntarily poor, whose heart is in no way settled on earthly thing like wealth, pleasures, honours possessions, gifts and similar things, as Daivd says "If riches abound, do not set your heart on them" (Psalm 62.10).[199]

The next homily on John 15, for the common of the evangelists, contains a long and clear apology for the call to the preaching ministry and the character of the true preacher which is in line with the whole ethos and reoccupation of these homilies from 1525 and before:

> Many are elected by God not directly, like the apostles, buy through the means of men's ministry as were the disciples of the apostles like Stephen and his companions, Timothy, Titus, Philemon and many others who were or now are good bishops, priests and pastors from whom we require that they preach evangelise, preach and purely proclaim the holy word of God. This is the true apostolic office without which one may no more be called bishop or pastor than a dead tree stump or a stone; for this is an office of obedience and service for the gospel, not of lordship or temporal domination.[200]

Besides these considerations, it is clear that the authors of the 1531 additions display the same lack of interest for the visible church institution as the Epistles and Gospels: the church of God is not a building or an institution but the believer's' heart. The Homily for the feast of dedication on the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Just like Zacchaeus received the Lord "in the temple of his heart" we should do the same. The homily adds, significantly:

> This is why I think that, by the singular counsel of God, this gospel [story] full of life was ordained to be read on such a day as this, notwithstanding the fact that

[197] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 372–377.
[198] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 378–381.
[199] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 373.
[200] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 379.

> neither stones nor altars are mentioned [in it], so that we may know that the true house of God is the heart, the soul, and the mind of the Christian where God wills to be served by prayer and worship, in spirit and truth.[201]

Nonetheless, the 1531 addition reveals a heightened sense of the persecution of the church and clearly the situation got worse from the Navarrian network in the previous six years. Interestingly, in the homily for the third Sunday after the octave of the epiphany which uses the well-known image of Christ's boat on the lake as a symbol of the church, the 1531 adds that such boat must face frightening waves and be agitated by persecution until the end.[202]

As we conclude these reflections on the 1531 edition of the Epistles and Gospels, it is worth saying something briefly about the differences between the 1531 addition and Lefèvre's commentaries. We showed above that there is a fairly close theological similarity between the 1525 Epistles and Gospels and the French humanist's biblical commentaries published in the 1520s and 30s. Therefore, the differences noted above between the 1525 and the 1531 homilies also apply to Lefèvre's commentaries. There are also a few clues in the 1531 additions that the author or authors have moved further away from Lefèvre. The most interesting clue is the homily for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost on Luke 18.9-14 that we quoted at length above for its strikingly Lutheran interpolation. The 1531 flatly contradicts both the 1525 homily and Lefèvre's commentary by stating that the pharisee was not simply *less* justified than the publican but positively *condemned*.

All in all, the 1531 additions are more distinctly Protestant and we detect a similar evolution in other documents printed by people associated with the Navarrian network in the 1530s. For example, this hardening of positions is also visible in the short preface to the 1534 edition of Lefèvre's New Testament by Pierre de Vingle is anonymous. The main point is again the superiority of God's word over human doctrines and traditions that ae unable to save. However, the wording is striking by its fierceness which is reminiscent of Antoine

[201] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 391.
[202] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 77.

Marcourt's placard, more than Lefèvre's soft-spoken language: human doctrine are shown by the apostle Paul to be "abomination, mud pool and stinking cesspool"[203]

Given that evolution, we will deal with the commonalities and differences between the Epistles and Gospels and the works of the two key personalities in the French speaking Reformed world in the 1530s: one in France, Gerard Roussel, and one in Switzerland, Guillaume Farel. However, before we do so, it is necessary to conclude our comparison between the Epistles and Gospel and other contemporary homilies by saying something about the question of allegories.

[203] "Abomination, bourbier et puantes cisternes." Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 527.

Chapter 3. The Allegory Question.

In the study above, we have come across frequent allegorical readings of Scripture in the Epistles and Gospels but also in the medieval homilies and Luther's homilies. Now, it is commonly held that the rejection of the medieval allegorical reading of Scripture is a distinctive trait of Protestant hermeneutic and exegesis. Hence, it is important to ask whether we note a movement toward a more Protestant hermeneutics in the Epistles and Gospels. As we do so, we will argue that allegorical readings are found in the Epistles and Gospel as well as Luther's postils, with different nuances, and that, therefore, the presence of allegorical reading is not in itself a legitimate argument to reject the distinctive Protestant nature of the Epistles and Gospels.

Let us say a word about the term "allegory" first. Modern evangelicals have traditionally used the terms "allegory" and "typology" in opposite ways. Allegory has a negative connotation and is used in relation to what is perceived as illegitimate exegesis, i.e., one that clearly has nothing to do with the original author's mind or which is used to make an illegitimate doctrinal statement from a passage that does not warrant it. One example among many would be Augustine's allegorical interpretation of the three decks of Noah's ark in the City of God which represents various states of chastity (married, widowed and virgin chastity).[204] Adolf von Harnack, speaking about Augustine but more generally about patristic exegesis, famously described such allegorical reading as "a kind of black art."[205] Conversely, typology is used to refer to a legitimate reference to Christ from an event or a character, especially from the Old Testament. For example, we would say that Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is a type of Christ through this own character and what happens to him. However, as Henri de Lubac has shown in his famous response to Jean Danielou, the early church used the terms

[204] Augustine, *The City of God*, XV.26.
[205] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. (Dover, 1961), 3:199.

interchangeably.[206] I will therefore use the term allegory and, as I will show below, it would be difficult to distinguish type from allegory in the homilies that we are studying in any case.

The allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and in particular the Old Testament, was commonplace by the end of the medieval period. A perfect illustration of this is the popularity of the so-called "*Biblia Pauperum*" from the 13th to the 15th centuries. They were short (about 40 pages) picture bibles that drew a correspondence between an event narrated in the gospels and events of the Old Testament. They were in a way a condensed version of the "*Bible Moralisées*" with less text and more pictures.[207] The name "*Biblia Pauperum*" is a misnomer since they were clearly made by theologians well-versed in Scripture and targeted at a public of educated lay readers who were able to appreciate those connections. As an example, the nativity is represented alongside two pictures: a picture of Moses at the burning bush and God appearing from the bush as Jesus Christ himself. The bush clearly symbolizes Mary as they are both the sign of divine presence. The other picture represents Aaron and his budding staff in Numbers 17. The staff symbolizes Mary, a virgin from which life stem forth. The text draws a parallel through a pun between "*virga*" ("staff" in Latin) and "*virgo*" ("virgin"). This is typical of the allegorical mindset of the late Middle Ages and we find the same mindset in Sully's and even Lyra's homilies, although Lyra famously emphasised the literal sense and claimed to endeavour to keep allegorical interpretations to a minimum in his famous commentary on the Old and New Testament (*Postilla Litteralis and Moralis*): "with the help of God, I plan to concentrate on the literal sense and to insert only a few short spiritual interpretation."[208]

[206] Henri de Lubac, "Typolologie et Allégorisme," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 34 (1947).
[207] See the fascinating study by Tarald Rasmussen, "Bridging the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Biblia Pauperum, their Genre and Hermeneutical Significance," in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, the history of its interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbö (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014).
[208]Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation, the Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, transl. Paul L. Nyhus (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 286.

What about the Epistles and Gospels? Do we note an evolution in a Protestant direction when we compare the Epistles and Gospels with medieval homilies and Luther's. If so, what do we see? It is well-known that one of the conquests of the Protestant Reformation was the rejection of fanciful allegorical interpretation that had become characteristic of the Middle Ages and refocus the attention on the literal sense of the text of Scripture or make legitimate allegorical interpretation that point to the work or the person of Christ.

In his study mentioned above, De Lubac shows convincingly, and with many examples, that the 13th century witnessed a shift in the method of theological studies, from commentaries the text of Scripture itself (*sacra pagina*) to the Summa where the text was interpreted along the lines of Aristotelian concepts. Whist the 13th c. scholastics remained anchored in the text of Scripture, the 14th and 15th centuries witness a decadence characterized by the increasingly fanciful use of allegories that are detached from the literal text of Scripture and increasingly used to prove doctrines that are taken for granted as dogma. As De Lubac puts it, the allegories that should have been used "*ad aedificationem fidei*" (edification) are increasingly used "*ad confirmationem fidei*" (for confirmation).[209] Allegories become a way of confirming dogmas and, on the other hand, they are used to neutralize the plain sense of passages teaching a doctrine that is not accepted. As Ian Provan has noted in his historical study of hermeneutics: "Throughout history and down to the present time, one never finds readers allegorising genuinely authoritative texts to which they ascribe primary authority, even if they pretend otherwise."[210]

The homilies in the beginning of the liturgical calendar between the advent and Christmas contain two gospel passages that are interpreted allegorically to some extent by Sully, Lyra, the Epistles and Gospels, Luther and by Lefèvre himself in his 1523 on the gospel: The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in Matthe 21.1-9 (homily for the first Sunday of

[209] De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 380.
[210] Provan, *The Reformation*, 207.

advent) and the wedding at Cana in John 2 (1st Sunday of the octave for the epiphany). A comparison between the various ways these homilies approach these texts is revealing. It shows that the Epistles and Gospels are more restrained and focused on the literal text than Sully and Lyra, which as expected, but, surprisingly, also Luther. The extent to which Luther is prepared to allegorise these episodes of the New Testament comes as a shock to those who are unfamiliar with his homilies and lectures and goes against the grain of much scholarship. One scholar noted fifty years ago in a brief study of the Epistles and Gospels: "As we will see, Lefèvre uses and abuses of the allegorical explanation. No trace in him of the exigency of the "*sensus unicus*" as Luther formulated it in the years 1517-1518 and put in practice in his great commentaries of 1522."[211]

This may have been true of Luther's commentaries but certainly not of his preaching and his advent postils show a surprising amount of allegorising. As Ian Provan notes, Luther denounced fanciful medieval allegories but was never consistent with his own warnings.[212] Luther himself recognised the problem and his own inconsistency in that matter: "It was very difficult for me to break away from my habitual zeal for allegory, and yet I was aware that allegories were empty speculations and the froth, as it were, of the Holy Scriptures. It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine."[213]

Let us take those three passages in turn:

3.1 Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21.1-9):

Sully:

Sully has nothing specific to say about Christ's entry in Jerusalem but uses the passage as a springboard to evoke the topic of Christ's several comings: Sully distinguishes three comings:

[211] Henri Meylan, "Lefèvre d'Etaples, les Thèmes Théologiques des Epistres et Evangiles des 52 Dimanches," in *L'humanisme Français au Début de la Renaissance*, Colloque International de Tours (Vrin, 1973), 188.
[212] Provan, *The Reformation*, 217.
[213] Martin Luther, *Lectures of Genesis (1535–36)*, LW1:232–233.

a “wonderful” one (*adventus mirabilis*), in other words, the incarnation; a “humble” one (*adventus humilis*), the birth of Christ; and a “terrible” one (*adventus terribilis*), his return at the end of the age to judge the living and the dead. Sully’s main concern is to impress on his hearers the necessity to prepare themselves for Christ’s appearing, as it represented by the coming into Jerusalem. In conformity with Sully’s traditional medieval semi-pelagian soteriology, the way to prepare is through devout prayers, alms and works of charity.

Lyra:

The second homily on the first Sunday of Advent on Matthew 21.1-9 (the entry in Jerusalem) reveals interesting differences both at a hermeneutical and theological level. Interestingly, both homilies teach the allegorical meaning of the two donkeys that is common in medieval theology and originates in Augustine:[214] the donkey on which Christ is seated symbolises the people of Israel under the yoke of the law whereas the foal that has never been mounted represents the gentiles who have never been under the Mosaic law. As we saw above on page 19, he then goes on to say that Peter was one of the two disciples sent to untie the donkey (which is not mentioned in Matthew) and he makes a striking theological application about Peter representing the sacerdotal power of priests to “untie” people from their sins. This is a good example of gratuitous allegory unhinged from the text and without reference to the redemptive flow of Scripture that was increasingly used “*ad confirmationem fidei*” as De Lubac said.

Epistles and Gospels:

The Epistles and Gospels follow the traditional allegorical interpretation of the donkey and the foal that we have already see in Lyra: the donkey on which Christ is seated is the “Judaical people” under the law whereas the foal represents the gentiles who are without law and idolaters. The meaning of the entry with both animals is to express Christ’s desire to bring the

[214] Tractate 51 on John’s Gospel.

two people together and save them. Interestingly, the author adds that Chrit sits on one people through both the law and the grace of faith, and on the other through the grace of faith only. Thus, the Jewish people also received grace from the Lord and is called to faith. The "daughter of Zion" represents every faithful soul who rejoice to hear that their king is coming to redeem and save them. Again, we find a similar interpretation in Lefèvre's commentary which also contain a striking Trinitarian application: the crowd represents the blessed who worship God for eternity but there is a double meaning to the "Hosanna" that they shout: in one sense, they are addressing this hosanna to God which means that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they recognise him as God. However, in a deeper sense, it is addressed to the Father whom they ask to save Christ. Therefore, concludes Lefèvre, the crowd utters a threefold utterance: one of joy in the Holy Spirit, an utterance of praise to the Father and of Christ as God, and an invocation to Christ as man.[215] This striking and sophisticated Trinitarian application was likely present in the mind of Lefèvre and or of his circle when they wrote the homily but they no doubt consciously avoided this kind of sophisticated interpretation in homilies which were targeted to a less sophisticated audience.

Luther:

Luther's interpretation of the entry in Jerusalem is very surprising, both for the very large amount of space dedicated to allegorical interpretation and for the radically idiosyncratic character of such allegories. As in the other homilies, Luther dedicates a part of the homily at the end to what he calls the "mystery or the spiritual meaning."[216] In this homily, Luther focuses on the need to preach the gospel and the entry in Jerusalem is interpreted along those lines. The two disciples sent to the village ahead represent all the apostles and preachers who have been sent into the world. Perhaps more surprisingly, the two donkeys represent not two peoples but disciples and hearers:

[215] Quoted in *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 6.
[216] Later editions have "Now let us also look at its hidden or spiritual meaning." See, LW75:50.

> Why does he have them bring two donkeys, or why are not both the same, two young or two old ones, if it was not enough for Him to ride on one? Answer: just as the two disciples represent the preachers, so the two donkeys represent their disciples and hearers. The preachers shall be Christ disciples and be sent by Him; that is, they should preach nothing but Christ's doctrine. Nor should they go to preach unless they are called to this, as the apostles have kept both of these. But the students are the old and the young donkeys.[217]

But Luther has not yet exhausted the allegorical options with the donkeys! He then embarks on a distinction between what he calls the two parts of man: the outer part – visible conduct – and the inner man – his heart and conscience. The older donkey is the outer man whilst the colt is the inner man which can never be subject to the law, even if tied by its conscience. But he has no desire for love until Christ comes and rides him. The preachers who untied the two animals are the preachers who have untied consciences from the law by the gospel. Then follows a fairly lengthy development on Christ's spiritual riding of the inner man. For good measure, Luther concludes with the hypothesis (he is not entirely sure!) that the cloaks put on the colt by the apostles are their good examples, namely their preaching and confession, their suffering and dying for the sake of the gospel. We recognise here one of Luther's major themes – the opposition between the inner man and the outer man famously expounded in the Freedom of the Christian – but it is clear that Luther uses this text as an allegorical springboard towards a theological doctrine that is not in it.

3.2 The wedding at Cana (Jn 2.1-11):

This is one of the best-loved passages in Scripture and the various elements of that story (water, wine, jars etc.) have given rise to many different interpretations.[218] All the homilies except Sully (writing as he does primarily for a monastic audience!) note how Christ

[217] LW75:50.
[218] See Craig S. Farmer, *The Gospel of John in the Sixteenth Century: The Johannine Exegesis of Wolfgang Musculus* (Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 1.

honoured the state of marriage. Then they engage in allegorical interpretation. Again, a comparison illustrates the sobriety of the Epistles and Gospels interpretation:

Sully:

As we saw above, Sully explains the water and wine allegorically in a way that is not only foreign to the teaching of the context but without legitimate ground: the water signifies bad Christians "who are cold like water and make those who drink it cold."[219] The wine signifies good Christians because it is usually drunk warm. Good Christian are "warm with God's love" and they warm those who pay attention to their advice. The Lord makes the same miracle every day when he turns cold Christians into warm Christians. Thus, Sully interprets the passage allegorically along the lines of his semi-pelagian theology and without any explicit reference to redemption history or to Christ's saving ministry. His interpretation vindicates De Lubac's point about the hermeneutical decadence of the 14th and 15th centuries.

Lyra:

Lyra is surprisingly more restrained and engages in a verse-by-verse running commentary of the passage with simple explanations about the context of the time and of the weeding. Nonetheless, his two main applications are a comparison between this miracle and the miracle of the Eucharist (referring to Thomas Aquinas) and the idea that Christ will one day clean us up from all sins.[220] Thus, Christ performs the miracle of changing something into something else every time mass is celebrated, and he will change us on the last day.

Epistles and Gospels:

The Epistles and Gospels mainly apply the passage to the marriage between Christ and his bride, the church. This is the main spiritual teaching of the passage. On the day Christ rose from the dead, his church was purified from her sin and admitted to the great wedding banquet prepared by Christ. The six jars represent the need for purification of sin, performed

[219] Sully, *Expositions*, 26.
[220] Lyra, *Postilles*, 65.

by the grace of God, and the fact that they are made of stone (pierre) points to Christ, who is the true stone (*pierre*) from which water gushed forth in the desert, as Saint Paul indicates in 1 Cor. 10.4 ("*La pierre était Christ*"). The wine that the church faithful are served at this banquet is the pure doctrine of Christ unmixed with the water of merely human understanding or love. This interpretation is strikingly similar to the one Lefèvre puts forward in his commentary on the Gospels: the need for purification, the stone being Christ, the three days refereeing to the resurrection of Christ by which he purified his church, water representing the insipid doctrines and devotions of men.

Luther:

Luther's homily is long and detailed and divided into three parts: the importance of marriage, the faith and love revealed in the gospel and third, the spiritual significance of this marriage.[221] Unlike the other homilies, Luther has a lot to say about Mary who is commended for her simple faith. As for the allegorical interpretation, one is again taken aback by Luther's wild imagination and his turning every single detail into allegories: the basic meaning of the story is the marriage of Christ with his church as Christ makes clear in the parable of Mt 22.1-4. Then things get trickier: the name Cana refers to the zeal of the Jews for the law and against the gospel, whilst "Galilee" signify the border between two countries, pointing to the fact that the legalistic Jews living in "Zeal city" should cross the border into Christ's kingdom. Christ being invited to the marriage means that he was promised long ago into the law and prophets and that he would one day come and turn the water of the law into the wine of faith and turn us all into true Galileans. His mother is the Christian church taken from the Jews (since Christ came for the jews first). The six jars are the books of the Old Testament which made the Jews only outwardly pure. They are made of stone referring to the tablets of the law written on stone; there are six of them pointing to the need of a 7th day in which we

[221] Second Sunday after Epiphany. Martin Luther, *Sermons and Church Postils*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, 8 vols. (Baker Books, 1995), 3:54–69.

rest from our works. To turn the water into wine means making the interpretation of the law delightful and Christ asked for the jars to be filled to the brim to indicate that the law can never free us from sin, no matter how full the jars may be. The ruler of the feast who does not know where the wine comes from is the old priesthood of the Jews who new nothing but works.

As we reflect on allegory, let us mention one more homily before we draw a conclusion. This is the homily on Luke 21.2533 for the 2nd Sunday of Advent which describes the signs in heaven before the return of Christ at the end of the age. It is striking that Luther is the only one of the four to interpret these signs allegorically. Sully and Lyra seem to take for granted that the signs described by Christ in that passage are to be interpreted literally and their main concern is to exhort their hearers to be ready for Christ's return. Sully challenges them to prepare themselves for this frightening day and ensure they will be found acceptable by Christ by ridding themselves of all our sins and behaviours that the Christ not approve. Lyra limits himself to say that the just will be saved and the unjust condemned. The Epistles and Gospels draw a comparison between those signs in heaven and the signs at the time of Christ's first coming (the star over Bethlehem, the slaughter of the innocents by Herod, the sun darkened during the crucifixion etc.) again, strikingly, the Epistles and Gospels stress the need of faith, unlike the medieval homilies: we must believe with firm faith that we will rise again on that day. Repentance will be too late for those who witness those signs and the return of Christ because it will no longer be possible to believe what they will see. The main stress of the homily remains the joy of the just who will rise on that day. The emphasis is the same in Lefèvre's commentary.

This contrast sharply with Luther's extravagant allegorical interpretation on the same passage in his homily for the same day. The "spiritual meaning" of these verses, as Luther calls it, is expounded in detail, with each phenomenon representing something. The sun losing

its brightness signifies that Christ "does not shine in Christendom" because the gospel is not preached properly. Luther is clear as to the reason why: "The pope sits in the churches in the place of Christ and shines like crap in a lantern – he with his bishops, priests, and monks. They are the ones who have darkened the sun for us, and instead of the true worship of God, they have set up the worship of idols and ghosts with their tonsures, hoods, vestments, pipes, ringing, singing, chiming etc. Oh, what darkness, what darkness!"[222] The falling of the starts represents the falling of a man who has been baptised as a Christian and then become a cleric or a monk. The powers of heaven are our "planets": tyrants, popes, bishops, universities, all of which are compromised in the world and have lost their way.[223] All these phenomena are being brought to an end by the dawn of the faithful preaching of the gospel.

These few examples are representative of what we find throughout these homilies. The Epistles and Gospels appear to be the most restrained of the four in terms of allegories. There are a few exceptions to this, as for example the 2nd homily on John 6 (multiplication of bread) for the fifth Sunday after the octave of the epiphany, in which the five loaves that Christ multiplies are said to symbolise the five books of Moses because they are made of barley, a cereal that has a hard shell and is therefore an apt symbol for the law. This is an allegory that we already find in Augustine.[224]

Another element contributes to blur the picture with respect to allegories: the 1531 additions, whilst being clearly more Protestant in their theological revisions, also show a strange, albeit limited, tendency to allegorise in an arbitrary way. There are two occurrences of such allegorising. In the 2nd homily on John 1 for the fourth Sunday of advent, the words of John the Baptist about his indignity to untie the sandals of Christ are interpreted allegorically in the 1531 addition: the feet symbolise the longing for the Word of God and the shoes the protections against spiritual harm. This is justified by a reference to Isa 52.7 (How beautiful

[222] LW75:110.
[223] Luther makes a pun on the verb to "wander" from which the Greek word "planet" derives.
[224] Tractate 25 on John's Gospel.

are the feet of those who announce the gospel). This is then said to be the same symbolic shoe removed by Boaz, ancestor of Christ according to the flesh, in Ruth 4 and the one God asked Moses to remove in Exodus 3.

The second is in the long homily mentioned above for the nativity of Mary where the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are said to represent the three theological virtues (faith, love and hope) for no apparent reason from the context.[225]

This study is revealing because it calls into question the idea that one fundamental aspect of sixteenth century Protestant hermeneutics is the rejection of the medieval allegorical reading of Scripture. Whilst there is some truth in this, the Protestant reformers did not entirely or immediately eliminate allegorical readings from their writing. Luther in particular appears very fond of them in the Advent Postils. This is perhaps surprising in the sense that the rejection of allegorical interpretation was seen as the fundamental point of departure of Luther from medieval exegesis. As one older scholar put it, "Beware of allegories was the motto of many of his lectures to his students."[226] however, more recent scholarship recognised Luther's fondness for allegories and his difficulty in breaking off with that habit.[227] Again, a comparison between the Epistles and Gospels and medieval homilies and Luther homilies reveal interesting differences. We note a trajectory, not from allegorical to literal reading, but from two kinds of allegorical readings: a medieval one oblivious of the development of redemption history, and one more conscious of it. For example, Sully's allegorical interpretation of the untying of the donkeys as representing the sacramental power of priests to forgive sins is typical of what Lubac says of allegory being used improperly as "*confirmationem fidei*" as we saw above. Sully's homilies are typical of late medieval homilies in that he shows very little interest for the literal sense of the passage preached. Although he clearly believes in the historical truth of the passages, he is keen to move on to

[225] *Epistles and Gospels*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, 370.
[226] Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 89.
[227] Provan, *The Reformation*, 217.

the allegorical meaning. This is true of all his homilies and one constantly finds the stereotyped formula: "x represents y".

This flattening of redemption history through allegories is well-defined by a contemporary scholar defining allegory in negative terms with respect to typology: "Typology emerges from the relationship between the two Testaments and centres in Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Allegory emerges from a flattening of the Scriptures into an atemporal whole, in which the same truth is to be found throughout. In this, it reveals the vertical dualism of Platonism rather than the eschatological vision of Scripture."[228]

In other words, that type of allegory does not look forward to a movement from Old Testament to New or, in the words of Tarald Rasmussen in his study on *Biblia Pauperum*, "the allegorical interpretation is more general and also easier to apply, because it is not restricted to the logic of fulfilment."[229] Conversely, the allegorical readings of the Epistles and Gospels, even though they may not be acceptable by evangelical readers today, are striking for their keen sense of the development of redemption history: the passage from the old covenant to the new, from the reign of the mosaic law to grace, from the Jewish people to the gospel proclaimed to the nations. In this sense, one may argue that the allegories of the Epistles and Gospels are more "Protestant" than the one we find in Luther. In fact, the most interesting aspect of this comparison is the approach of the Epistles and Gospels with respect to Luther's approach. It is striking how Luther uses allegory "*ad confirmationem fidei*" and his interpretation is clearly driven not by the flow of redemption history but by his own theological insights: as we saw above, Luther sifts those passages through the grid of his own theological convictions rather than the context. He clearly sees some of his well-known "hobby horses": the need for preachers, the dichotomy between the inner man and the outer man, the rigid contrast between law and gospels.

[228] Craig Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Baker Academic, 2015), 145.
[229] Rasmussen, "Biblia Pauperum," 82.

From the above study, which is clearly not exhaustive of all the allegories found in the homilies, I would therefore argue two things: firstly, the presence or absence of allegorical reading is not sufficient in itself to determine whether sixteenth century sermons or indeed commentaries on Scripture are truly Protestant or not. Secondly, the Epistles and Gospels by their restraint in the use of allegories, by their focus on the literal sense of Scripture and by their keen sense of the flow of redemption history, unmistakably point towards the classic Genevan Calvinist hermeneutics and constitutes a greater advance than what we find in Luther's 1520s homilies.

Another factor is likely to explain the ambiguous nature of allegory in these works. As Calvin scholar Olivier Millet notes in his introduction of Calvin's 1541 Institutes in French,[230] the turning point in the gradual rejection of the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is the hermeneutical revolution proposed by Calvin. This is what Calvin sets out in the famous chapter 7 (similarities and differences of the Old and New Testaments) which appears in the 1539 edition and that Calvin translates in French two years later: "Both covenants can be explained in one word. The covenant made with the fathers of old, in its substance and reality, is so similar to ours that it can said to be the very same. It differs only in the way it is dispensed."[231]

Humanists denounced a lazy and routine usage of allegory that avoided wrestling with the literal sense of the text and its historical context and the examples noted above in Sully and Lyra certainly fall in that category. Calvin's move transformed the way Christian readers related to Old Testament events and characters. Millet explains the far-reaching consequences of this hermeneutical shift as follows:

[230] Jean Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne (1541)*, ed. Olivier Millet (Droz, 2008).
[231] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1541 edition)*, ed. and trans. by Robert White (Banner of Truth 2014), 430.

> Instead of setting up these characters as "types" prefiguring truths revealed in the New Testament, instead of seeing them as inconsistent shadows waiting for the revelation of their true identity, it (Calvin's chapter) recognizes in them figures which already fulfil the substance of the Christian life self-consciously, as concrete models humanly close to us. In other words, where Christian tradition tended to see in them types symbolizing future Christian realities, the Calvinist hermeneutics sees in them the true face of believers. This transformation explains the centrality of the Old Testament in the Reformed mindset because it encourages a direct and strongly emotional identification of the Christian faithful with those types…[232]

One of the decisive shifts introduced by Protestant hermeneutics allowed Christians to appropriate the Old Testament in a way that turned Old Testament characters into brethren in the faith, not just types to imitate or not, making them closer to them and lessening the need for an allegorical reading of their lives. This only happened gradually but the shift to a more Protestant form of allegory is already perceptible in the Epistles and Gospels.

[232] Olivier Millet, in Calvin, *Institution* (Droz 2008), 960.

Chapter 4. Guillaume Farel's and Gérard Roussel's works: divergent trajectories confirmed.

In the previous chapters, we carried out a theological analysis of the 1525 Epistles and Gospels and compared them with other popular homilies at the time, arguing that the Epistles and Gospels express a Lutheran view about the authority of Scripture and the role of faith in salvation whilst having different emphases from Luther's Advent Postils. We then considered the theological evolution discernible in the 1531 editions and the role of allegory in the homilies. We argued that the allegorical interpretation present in the Epistles and Gospels does not preclude them from being truly Lutheran and we discerned an increasing hardening of language in the 1531 edition about freewill and man's depravity.

As we trace the theological evolution of the Epistles and Gospels in the 1530 it is appropriate to compare them with similar documents produced by the two main Reformed French theologians in the 1530s: Guillaume Farel and Gerard Roussel. This comparison is pertinent to the subject because both Farel and Roussel were key members of the Meaux Group from its inception in 1523, and therefore key members of what Reid has called the Navarrian Network. However, their trajectories diverged radically from the mid-1520s, Farel leaving France for Switzerland and becoming the main operator of the Reformation in Geneva whilst Roussel never left the established church in France and became the prime target of the "anti-nicodemite" attacks from Calvin and Farel in the late 1530s.[233] From this analysis, we argue that the Epistles and Gospels follow a similar trajectory as Roussel.

In their introduction to the Epistles and Gospels, Bedouelle and Giacone speculate about the possible authors of the 1531 additions and tentatively suggest that Roussel may be the most plausible candidate.[234] They exclude Lefèvre on the ground that he withdrew into silence from those years but it is quite possible that he may have evolved in his theological positions

[233] Frans Pieter Van Stam, "The Group of Meaux as First Target of Farel and Calvin's Anti-Nicodemism," *Biliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, T. 68, No. 2 (2006), 253–275.
[234] *Epistres et Evangiles*, ed. Bedouelle and Giacone, xxxix–lxi.

and, in any case, these additions are anonymous. One of the candidates they exclude, not surprisingly, for being very different from Lefèvre, both in tone and in theology, is Guillaume Farel.

The author(s) of the 1531 edition is unknown and discussing various hypothesises is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is interesting that Bedouelle and Giacone single out Roussel and Farel and a comparison between the two of them and with the Epistles and Gospels is in order. It is necessary to say something about Farel as we investigate the connections between the Epistles and Gospels and other French evangelical writings in the 1520s and 1530s because Farel, not Calvin, was the most prominent French speaking reformer in those years.[235]

4.1 Guillaume Farel (1489–1565)

Farel always was the most zealous reformer of the group of Meaux and it is no coincidence that he left as early as 1523, at the time of Briçonnet's U-turn, nor is it by chance that the bourgeois of Paris in his diary holds him responsible for the "Lutheran heresy" that "infested" Meaux. Farel left France for Basel in 1524 and would never come back. At the end of July 1524, he settled in the Duchy of Montbéliard near Switzerland and asked the duke authorisation to preach. There was no evangelical text in French available there at the time and Johann Oecolampadius who had encouraged him to go and preach in Montbéliard also encouraged him to start writing something in French.[236] In August 1524 Farel published two brief expositions on the Lord's Prayer and on the Apostles' Creed.[237] Five years later, in 1529, Farel published the first summary of evangelical doctrines in the French language, the

[235] For an introduction on Guillaume Farel's life and theology, see Jason Zuidema and Theodore Van Raalte, *Early French Reform, the Theology and Spirituality of Guillaume Farel* (Ashgate, 2011).
[236] Jules Pétremand et al., *Guillaume Farel*, *Biographie Nouvelle* (Delachaux & Niestlé, 1930), 139.
[237] Guillaume Farel, *Le Pater Noster et le Credo en Francais*, ed. Francis Higman (Droz, 1982).

"Sommaire" (Summary).[238] This was the only handbook of evangelical theology available in French in and around Switzerland until Calvin published his Institutes which, from Farel's own confession, made the Summary superfluous.[239]

Why compare these documents to the Epistles and Gospels? They are not homilies to be read out to an assembled congregation. One is a brief pamphlet for personal devotion (the exposition on the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed) the other a doctrinal handbook. The comparison is meaningful for a couple of reasons. The "exposition" was written in Summer 1524 while Lefèvre's team in Meaux were preaching the substance of what would become the Epistles and Gospels and it is the earliest text in French expounding an evangelical theology.[240] Curiously, the title of the commentary on the exposition of the Lord's Prayer in the only known copy reads "to be read instead of the rosary when possible".[241] The Sommaire clearly shows what Farel's theological emphases were in the late 1520s. Besides, since his experience in Meaux, Farel was more than anything a preacher and the homiletic, exhortatory tone is unmistakable in both works. The exposition of the Lord's Prayer and of the creed are in the form of a prayer to God. They are both largely inspired by two short works by Martin Luther[242] but Farel has added a few personal thoughts to Luther's text. Both the exposition and the Sommaire are by far the most popular theological exposition of the Reformed faith in French in the later 1520s and early 1530s as the numerous editions bear witness.[243] A brief comparison with the Epistles and Gospels is therefore logical and, once again, reveal some

[238] "Summaire" in sixteenth century spelling. The full title is "Sommaire et Brève Déclaration d'Aucun Lieux Fort Nécessaires à Chacun Chrétien pour Mettre sa Confiance en Dieu et Aider son Prochain" (Summary and brief declaration of certain points most necessary for each Christian to put his trust in God and help his neighbour). The 1529 edition (often wrongly dated 1525) is now lost and my comments are based on the 1534 edition reprinted in Geneva in the 19th century: Guillaume Farel, *Le Sommaire Reimprimé d'après l'Edition de l'An 1534* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1867).
[239] For an overview of the Summaire's doctrine, see: Robert White, "An Early Doctrinal Handbook, Farel's Summaire et Breve Declaration," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 69 (2007): 21–38.
[240] It was thought to be lost but one copy (the only one ever found) was found in 1972 in the National Austrian Library in Vienna. See Farel, *Pater Noster*, 11.
[241] "pour lire au lieu du chapelet quand on aura loisir."
[242] Farel, *Pater Noster*, 15–16.
[243] Farel, *Pater Noster*, 25.

substantial differences both in theology and in the way it approaches the teaching of Scripture despite a few similarities.

A word about similarities first, especially in the first text. Obviously, we find the same emphases of the Epistles and Gospels about Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide. More specifically, we find the same emphasis on the personal relationship between the believer and God. This is perhaps more surprising in the Epistles and Gospels which are homilies meant to read in church but this emphasis is striking also in Farel. Interestingly, the exposition of the Lord's Prayer is itself in the form of a prayer. After a brief introduction about prayer in general, Farel expounds the Lord's Prayer in the form of a prayer to God paraphrasing the words of Christ and explaining them as he goes along. This in itself communicates this emphasis on the personal relationship between God and the believer, as well as the frequent references to God's goodness and mercy. Perhaps surprisingly from Farel, whose image of firebrand is not entirely unjustified, there is nothing about God's holiness or majesty: "Since faith looks exclusively at the abyss of God's goodness, depending entirely on God's mercy and kindness, one of the most noble fruits that it produces is prayer, elevating our mind and soul to God."[244]

Another notable point in common with the Epistles and Gospels is the constant, tight connection between God's word and our faith in him. References to faith abound in these few pages: God wants to help us in our incredulity and reinforces our faith; we receive everything by faith; we cry out by faith. one of his favourite expressions is "firm faith" (ferme fiance). These themes are perfectly in harmony with the content and ethos of the Epistles and Gospels and we can well imagine Farel taking part in their drafting if they were written before his exile in 1523.

However, beyond that commonality of themes that we would expect on Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide, the differences of theological emphasises are more significant. The main one,

[244] Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and Creed in Guillaume Farel, *Pater Noster*, 35–36.

as per Luther and the 1531 additions, is a noticeable emphasis on man's depravity and inability not to sin which, as we saw above, is studiously avoided in the Epistles and Gospels. The commentary on the Apostle Creed, though very brief, is particularly striking because most of it is simply a straightforward translation of Luther's Betbuchlein. However, at the end, Farel has felt the need to add this fairly convoluted invocation to God:

> I only rely on you because I know that, on my own, and without your holy grace and favour, and without your Holy Spirit, I cannot do anything but sin; and being the object of your grace through faith I cannot sin; not that I may do anything in this life that is not tainted by imperfection, but because the grace you give to my faith extinguishes and destroys all the power of evil and is the reason why such imperfection is not imputed to me…[245]

The same emphasis is found in the 1529 Sommaire in which the theological gap between Farel and the Epistles and Gospels is clearly seen. As mentioned above, despite the very different typology of the two documents (homilies and brief enchiridion of doctrine), three salient features in the Sommaire are significant in that respect.

First, Farel's Sommaire is almost entirely based on stark contrasts between opposite ideas. This is the most immediately striking feature on this work. Brief chapters expounding antithetical concepts follow each other: God/ man; law/ gospel; sin/ justice; flesh or the old man/ spirit or the new man; faith/ merit; human traditions/ Scripture etc. The binary structure of the book, which probably preserves something of Farel's sermons, makes a theological point: the irreconcilable difference between sinful man and God and the need of a radical conversion in order to be reconciled to him. This mindset typical of Farel is of course something we find in Luther's thought. One need only to think about the contrast between law and grace in Luther's theology and hermeneutics or the famous opening paradox of the Freedom of the Christian: "a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[246]

[245] Guillaume Farel, *Pater Noster*, 54.
[246] LW31:344.

Secondly, the largest part of the Sommaire focuses precisely on what the Epistles and Gospels studiously avoid all along, including in the 1531 additions: a sharp critique of the Roman Church's structure, sacramental system and sacraments: the Roman teaching on the mass, confession and contrition, penance and good works, purgatory and saints are clearly denounced in various chapters which are among the longest in the book.

Thirdly, in the Sommaire, Farel unites for the first time in the French language two theological emphases which reveal what is perhaps the key difference between the Epistles and Gospels and the French theology coming from Switzerland in those years: on the one hand, Farel is clear about God's sovereign election in salvation. As we saw above, this emphasis is notable in the 1531 additions to the Epistles and Gospels but these additions are too limited for this emphasis to be prominent. In Farel's Sommaire, this emphasis, together with the emphasis on man's depravity as noted above leaves the reader in no doubt that humanity is divided in two groups, elect and non-elect. For example, in chapter 13, Farel defines "grace" as follows: "Grace is the… favour of our good father who, out of love for himself, in order to infallibly regenerate and save those he has ordained to life without any consideration of the person or works of the one he has chosen, forgives all his transgressions and sins by his most precious son Jesus Christ."[247]

However, and this is the decisive move, Farel draws the logical consequences of the doctrine of election for ecclesiology: the true church of Christ is not a visible institution but the gathering, in any time or place, of those who have been thus elected. This is made clear in chapter 16 where the church is defined as follows: "

> The church of Jesus Christ is the holy congregation of the faithful who, by true faith, are united to and grafted in Christ, whose members they are… this church does not consists in diversity of degrees, laws, ordinances and commandments given by man's will but by true union of faith in our lord Jesus, whose wholly voice they hear and believe.[248]

[247] Guillaume Farel, *Sommaire*, 25–26.
[248] Farel, *Sommaire*, 31.

In the very last chapter on the last judgment, Farel makes the connection between ecclesiology and eschatology crystal clear: this spiritual election of the elect in this world will become very visible on the last day:

> Christ does not say 'come to me you circumcised and baptised, you who are my apostles or disciple, Jews and Christians.' Rather, to all languages and nations he says 'come to me you to whom my Father has given his blessing and prepared a kingdom from the beginning of the world.' For nothing can prevent God's election and his immutable purpose, whether the one he has ordained to life is born and brought up in Turkey or dies in his mother's womb.[249]

This arguably points to the reason why the Epistles and Gospels are reluctant to focus on the doctrine of election and man's depravity and freewill. Because, as Luther first understood, and Farel articulates here in 1529, soteriology controls ecclesiology and eschatology: the reality of human depravity and inability to believe and God's sovereign election inevitably leads not only to the collapse of the sacramental system but also to a different notion of the church. This was precisely what the authors of the Epistles and Gospels wanted to avoid, anxious as they were to operate within the framework of the established church institution in France. This is the one dividing factor that led Farel and Calvin to attack the Navarrian network from 1537. This is in stark contrast with Roussel's writings that confirm growing gaps between the two trajectories.

4.2 Gerard Roussel (c.1500–1555)

Roussel is the final important character that we must mention before coming to a general synthesis of our argument. His date of birth is unknown but he was born near Amiens in northern France sometime at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Roussel is a central character in the Navarrian network whose ministry has been forgotten today. The last systematic study of his theology dates back to the 19th century.[250] Indeed, Roussel is mainly

[249] Farel, *Sommaire*, 120–121.
[250] Charles Schmidt, *Gérard Roussel, Prédicateur de la Reine Marguerite de Navarre: Memoire Servant à l'Histoire des Premières Tentatives Faites pour Introduire la Réformation en France* (Schmidt and Grucker, 1845).

remembered today for being the main target of Farel's and Calvin's attacks against what they called the "Nicodemites". There is no doubt that he was the main character they had in mind and it is easy to see why when one considers his career: he was a disciple and friend of Lefèvre and he collaborated with him closely in Meaux, occasionally disagreeing with him, and followed him in exile in Strasbourg at the end of the Meaux experiment in that fateful year of 1525. Significantly, he and Lefèvre did not join Farel in Switzerland and did not abandon their vision of reforming the established church in France although they saw first-hand the result of Bucer's and Capito's reforming program in Strasbourg. Indeed, Roussel had the impression that Strasbourg was the most perfect school of Christ, to borrow from John Knox. He writes to a correspondent in Meaux in December 1525:

> Here, Christ alone is worshipped by his Word and is alone accepted as the head and foundation. . . . Almost everything that seemed to hinder piety has been removed, such as the images affixed to the churches, which fabricated the cult of the saints, masses, and other prayers for the dead and purgatory. . . . In the church services, nothing is said or sung that is not understood by all. . . . Scripture is explained most simply, not with insipid allegories, and is generally free from human inventions.[251]

The one thing that must have struck Lefèvre and Roussel is the fact that preaching was the main instrument used by Bucer, Zell and Capito to reform the city as was shown by Miriam Usher Chrisman in her study of the Reformation in that city.[252] What they attempted in Meaux at diocesan level was actually working in a city state like Strasbourg. As Chrisman puts it: "The focus of the Strasbourg Reformation was on preaching. It was the act of preaching that changed a man from priest to reformer, and it was through sermons that the new ideas were communicated to a significant number of the burghers."[253]

---

[251] "Hic solus Christus colitur per suum Verbum, solusque pro capite suscipitur et fundamento. . . . Ablegata sunt pene omnia quae pietati incommodare videbantur, cuius generis erant imagines templis affixae, quae cultum Sanctorum ementiebantur, missae et alia pro defunctis suffragia, quae, purgatoria. . . . In conventu populi nihil dicitur aut canitur quod non intelligatur ab omnibus. . . . Scriptura simplicissime tractatur, reiectis frigidissimis allegoriis, ac in totum libera est ab humanis inventionibus." Roussel to Nicolas le Sueur, December 1525, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 1:411.

[252] Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reformation: a Study in the Process of Change* (Yale University Press, 1967).

[253] Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reformation,* 98.

When Francis was liberated after the battle of Pavia, he and Lefèvre were encouraged to go back to France and continue their reform program. He distinguished himself as a preacher and Marguerite appointed him her personal preacher at her court in Alençon. His evangelical piety seems to have been well-known in Europe. Capito refers to him as man in whom "the most judicious discernment is combined with the utmost zeal for the glory of God.[254] During Lent 1531, he was accused by the Faculty Paris of preaching heresy in Marguerite's presence at the Louvres and the same accusation was made again in 1533.[255] His preaching of the new evangelical doctrines caused a scandal in Paris in 1534 and he withdrew for a while at Marguerite's court as before she appointed him bishop of Oloron in Navarre in 1540, an appointment that was a major factor in written attacks he received from Farel and Calvin.[256] His career seems to fit perfectly what Jonathan Reid named the "Navarrian" network and what Calvin and Farel would denounce as Nicodemism.

Roussel's theology is particularly interesting and he gives us an important clue as to the theological peculiarities of the Epistles and Gospels and the other early French theological writings we analysed: on the one hand, his theology is openly and unambiguously evangelical or Lutheran. On the other hand, in contrast with Farel, he is clearly determined to operate within the framework of the established church and the Reformed doctrines that could jeopardise his position are handled with care or avoided altogether.

His sermons, some of which caused a stir in Paris in 1533, have been lost. His theological views can be surmised from two texts written in the 1540s when he was bishop of Oloron: an exposition of the Apostles Creed ("*Familière Exposition*") and instructions for pastoral visitation for the priests in his diocese ("*Forme de visite de diocese*"). Both works reflect an unmistakable Protestant soteriology and theology of Scripture that would have been approved by the magisterial reformers. As Roussel himself is not the main focus of this study

[254] Capito to Marguerite de Navarre, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 2:121.
[255] See Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior*, 308.
[256] See Van Stam, *The Group of Meaux*, 265–266.

I will limit myself to two brief observations about the "*Forme de visite*" to underline the commonalities between Roussel and the Epistles and Gospels. Although Roussel's works are much later (1540s) the point is still valid because we see the same strategy at work. Three points in particular are noticeable:

First, like the Epistles and Gospels, the *Forme de visite* focuses almost entirely on preaching which sets it apart from other works of the same kind. Episcopal visitations were common but they normally dealt mainly with ethical or practical issues (the moral standard of priests in particular).[257] This obviously reflect the central concern of the Epistles and Gospels and the whole group of Meaux.

Secondly, Roussel displays a mature soteriology that is impeccably Protestant and more developed than the one we find in the Epistles and Gospels:

> The justice of faith is called the justice of God, not, as Augustine says, that it is the justice by which God himself is just, but in which God freely clothes the sinner, when he pardons his sins and receives him in his grace, which properly can be called the justice of Jesus Christ. He is the author of it, and it is his, but it is attributed to us and given into our possession by the faith which receives it from him and grants it to us… We must say that the obedience of Jesus Christ, who is true and perfect justice… is communicated, attributed, and imputed to us and made ours by grace, in such a way that by grace we are made participants and beneficiaries of the fruit and merits.[258]

Roussel then adds that the law is powerless to justify but that Christ is the end and fulfilment of the law and that, by trusting in him, we fulfil the law by faith. Good deeds do not precede but stem from faith.[259] This is clearly a mature Protestant understanding that expounds more clearly what is already expressed more confusedly in the Epistles and Gospels.

---

[257] See, for example, Ansgar Wildermann and Véronique Pasche, "La Visite des Eglises du Diocese de Lausanne en 1453," *Société d'histoire de la Suisse Romande* (1993).

[258] "La justice de foy est appellée la justice de Dieu; non point, dict sainct Augustin, que soit la justice de laquelle Dieu est juste en soy, mais de laquelle Dieu vest gratuitement le pecheur, quant il luy pardonne ses pechez et le recoipt en sa grace, laquelle proprement peult estre appellée la justice de Jesuchrist, pource qu'il est l'autheur d'icelle, et est la sienne, mais nous est attribuée et appropriée par la foy qui nous l'impetre et la recoipt de luy. . . . ainsi debvons nous dire que l'obeissance de Jesuchrist qui est vraye et parfaicte justice . . . nous est communiquée, attribuée, imputée, et faicte nostre par grace, de sorte que par grace sommes faictz participans et joyssans du fruict et merite." Schmidt, *Roussel*, 227, 229.

[259] Schmidt, *Roussel*, 230.

Thirdly, we find the same desire to smoothen the angles when it comes to challenging the ecclesiological structure of the church. The interesting example is the way Roussel deals with the invocation of the saints.[260] Despite what he wrote from Strasburg in 1525 as we saw above, Roussel is careful how he challenges that practice and his critique of it is quite ingenious. He starts off by asserting that the main way to honour the departed saints is to admire their virtues and try to imitate them in our own lives. When it comes to praying them, Roussel exhorts the reader to reflect about the difference between praying to them and to Christ: the saints only pray for sinners, while Christ not only prays but has also died for them and we are baptised in his name. Besides, observes Roussel, the saints have now departed this life and they no longer have a body. This means they cannot see or hear us but know about us insofar as Christ reveals it to us. Besides, as they are in the immediate presence of Christ and are perfectly satisfied in him, they only want what he wants! Therefore, it is wrong to associate the saints with particular places or times and we must make sure that Jesus Christ is favourable to us because we only have access to the Father through him. This argument is remarkable for its moderate language, lack of insult (compare Farel), its tightly argued but simple reasoning. The hearer is not rebuked for praying to the saints but driven to the logical conclusion that there is not much point doing it. This is the kind of preaching that one expects from someone trying to reform the church from the inside and, in that respect, follows the model of the Epistles and Gospels.

This brief comparison between Farel and Roussel is interesting because it shows where the difference lies between the Navarrian network and the Genevan network, a difference already visible in embryonic form between the 1525 Epistles and Gospels and the 1531 edition: the reluctance to face the inevitable ecclesiological consequences of the Lutheran insights on anthropology and soteriology.

[260] Schmidt, *Roussel*, 235–236.

This leads us to the final part of our study in which we reflect more fully on the motivations of the authors of French evangelical literature in the 1520s and 30s, with particular reference to the Epistles and Gospels.

Chapter 5. The reasons for a distinctive theology.

Throughout this study, I have argued that the Epistles and Gospels are not simply a transition document and their theology cannot be adequately dismissed as "moderate" Lutheranism or Calvinism as some scholars have done. As Denis Crouzet perceptively observes in his analysis of the early Reformation in France, "the concept of moderation in historical studies is artificial."[261] What turns out to be "moderate" depends on the evolution of historical events and theological conflicts that cannot be fully predicted by the actors involved at the time they write.

If the Epistles and Gospels do not simply display a form of "moderate" Lutheranism, what were the authors trying to achieve? Three sets of explanations have been proposed to explain this apparent theological oddity. The oldest and most common one is simply fear. Another one, that applies more specifically to Lefèvre, is a platonic mysticism that explains the lack of interest to ecclesiastical reform. The third, argued by Reid is a conscious strategy. As Reid puts it: "The network was trying to appropriate the fruits of German Reformation for France in a way suited to their circumstances and in accord with their distinctive ideas about the goal of reform and the work of God in the world."[262] I will briefly touch on the first two and show why the theological analysis of the Epistles and Gospels vindicates Reid's idea of a deliberate plan.

5.1 Fear?

This is the oldest and most obvious explanation. This is what Farel and Calvin argued in their anti-Nicodemite polemic and Beza argues on the same line in his Life of Calvin. From 1536 and 37 when Farel and Calvin launch an all-out assault against Marguerite and her network, the accusation of cowardice is clearly hurled at them, in particular Roussel. The accusation

[261] Crouzet, *Réforme Française*, 156.
[262] Reid, *King's Sister*, 252.

has an apparent plausibility and it is clear that many in the French clergy who were convinced by the Lutheran theologies must have been hesitant to put their livelihood – if not their lives – at risk for their conviction. We saw in the introduction that the sanctions against the Lutherans came quickly and only got worse with time. Roussel himself admits that it is so in a couple of letters sent to Guillaume Farel from Meaux in March and August 1524. He says it would take a powerful faith to make him able to publish something contrary to the doctrine of the theologians from Paris (i.e. the University of Paris) and it is difficult to defy their censorship.[263] In the months following that letter, Farel writes to Roussel repeatedly, spurring him to provoke a public disputation which was Farel's own favourite evangelization technique in Switzerland. Farel also asked Oecolampadius and Zwingli to put pressure on Roussel in that sense. We know this because Roussel replies to Farel in August and lays bare his conflicted thought in the matter. He confesses that the letters of these men "of eminent piety" are less effective than "the flesh" and the advice of many people around him that "the time has not yet come". Roussel admits to being torn between his fear of afflictions and his belief in the infinitive power of prayers.[264] Fear clearly played a role in dampening the enthusiasm of men like Roussel and the risks increased with time, especially while the King was a prisoner in Spain, and even more from 1534 onwards when radicals tried to force the situation with the Placard affair. Antoine Fumée, one of the "Nicodemites" targeted by Calvin told him in a letter what many thought about him in France, indirectly giving us a glimpse of the difficulties faced by his compatriots: "A number of people think your assertions are most wretched (*miserrimum id esse quod praedicas*). They complain that you are harsh and very severe to those who are afflicted, and they say that it is easy for you to preach and threaten over there, but that if you were here, you would perhaps feel differently." [265] However, in the

[263] Roussel to Farel, 6 July 1524, Herminjard *Correspondance des Réformateurs,* 1:233.
[264] Roussel to Farel, 24 August 1524, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs,* 1:271–272.
[265] Antoine Fumée to Calvin, John Calvin, November 1543, *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, Ed. Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss. 59 vols. (1863-1900), 11:646.

case of Roussel, fear is not a sufficient explanation when we see with what zeal he endeavoured to reform his diocese. As one scholar comments:

> Roussel's experience shows that we must adjust our understanding of Nicodemism…at least for Roussel, and likely many others who chose to remain in France, fear and weakness had nothing to do with their decision. Roussel did not accept the bishopric in Oloron because he was greedy for money or fearful of persecution; he did it because he saw it as the best way to reform at least one corner of France. And under Marguerite's daughter, her brother-in-law Lescar, and Roussel's successor bishop in Oloron, that corner of present-day France (namely, Bearn), would become the most successful French-speaking Reformed state outside France.[266]

Similarly, as we argue below, fear alone cannot account for the careful way the Epistles and Gospels appropriate key elements of Lutheran theology while leaving others aside, nor can it account for the activities of Lefèvre and Marguerite themselves.

5.2 Platonism?

Some scholars have argued that Lefèvre's theology had nothing really Lutheran or Protestant about it; it was simply the theology of a mystical, Platonist humanist who was interested in going back to the source and focused more on the inner life of the believer than on the external paraphernalia of religion.[267] Therefore, it is argued, the specificities of Lefèvre's or the Epistles and Gospels' theology as we identified them above can be explained by those intellectual and mystical presuppositions: his emphasis on the plain sense of Scripture; his exalting Scripture and downplaying the role of church traditions; his focus on faith rather than works etc. In that sense, Lefèvre would be closer to the brethren of the *Devotio Moderna*[268] than Luther. This argument was made in various ways by several scholar of Roman Catholic confession and Carlos Eire argues along similar lines in his famous study on the Reformation

[266] Michael W. Bruening. "Calvin, Farel, Roussel, and the French "Nicodemites," in *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, 121.
[267] See, for example, Eugene Rice, "The Humanist Idea of Christian Antiquity: Lefèvre d'Etaples and His Circle," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 1962, vol.9 (1962).
[268] Movement promoting personal piety for the laity that flourished in Flanders and the Low Countries in the fifteenth century.

of worship,[269] for which he indebted to a previous article by Eugene Rice on Lefèvre's Platonism.[270]

Undoubtedly, some elements point in that direction. For example, as early as 1506, Lefèvre seems to have a clear spiritual development program in mind:

> For knowledge of ethics, politics and economics, drink from the fountain of a purified Aristotle. Those who wish to set themselves a higher end… will study Aristotle's metaphysics… Turn from this to a reverent reading of Scripture, guided by Cyprian, Hilary, Origen, Jerome, Augustine… and other fathers. Once these studies have purified the mind and disciplined the senses… the generous mind may aspire to scale gradually the higher heights of contemplation, instructed by Nicholas of Cusa and the divine Dionysius and other like them.[271]

Another clue is fact that Lefèvre called his commentary on the four Gospels "*commentari initiatorii*," which suggests that he intended them to be a first step for "uninitiated" Christians in a path leading to the higher, more spiritual meaning of the text. Lefèvre himself seems to be clear about his neo-platonic notion of the hierarchy of sources:

> The more nearly a light approximates the intensity of the sun, the more brightly it shines… and the closer a thing is to its origin, the more purely it retains its own nature… it follows that, of all the writings, the Holy Gospels are recognised as having the greatest dignity, splendour, ad authority, as writings which have emanated directly from God and have been infused into ready minds.[272]

The same logic seems to apply to his desire to retrieve the church fathers, a desire he shared with other humanists. Significantly, in 1526, Noel Beda, syndic of the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris, in his condemnation of Erasmus and Lefèvre, called them "*humanistae theologizantes*"[273] and he accused them of arrogantly ignoring the best scholastic medieval doctors, pretending to go back to the sources:

> They claim to drink from rivers which flow close to the very source of the divine wisdom and not from those rivulets which have degenerated because of their great distance from that source; in other words, they always have in their hands Origen,

[269] Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols, the Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[270] Rice, "Humanist Idea" 126–160.
[271] *Politicorum libri octo*, ed. Lefèvre d'Etaples (Paris, Henri Estienne the Elder, 1506), quoted in Rice, "Humanist idea," 126.
[272] Preface to *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Rice, *Prefaces*, 60.
[273] An epithet that clearly includes an element of contempt (a "dabbler in theology").

> Tertullian, Cyprian, Basil, Hilary… and others like them; but never scholastics like Lombard, Hales, Albertus, Thomas, Bonaventura, Ockham and so on. Thus do the humanists boast in their own words.[274]

This desire to focus on the Word of God alone is undoubtedly one of the main themes of the Epistles and Gospels and of Lefèvre's commentaries as we saw above. The fact that the Epistles and Gospels make no reference to the church fathers (except a few conventional references to Augustine and Jerome in the 1531 additions) is easily explained by their desire to keep the message simple for the carders of Meaux. We must not underestimate how strongly humanists like him rejected what they saw as the convoluted obscurities of the medieval scholastics like Lombard who were still regularly taught.[275] However, there is not need to assume that this focus on the Word of God alone is explained purely by some philosophical presuppositions. Another explanation, as simple as convincing, is that people like Lefèvre recovered a true sense of the pre-eminence of Scripture over the church traditions.

Lefèvre's own career and interests tell a similar story. The spiritual development program set out in the quote above was written in 1506 but, as we saw when we briefly sketched Lefèvre's writing career, it is very striking that he seemed to have lost interest in works of Greco-Latin scholarship and, from the early 1520s onward, dedicated himself exclusively to works of biblical scholarship and translation. One comment in his 1523 commentary on the gospel in revealing in that respect. Commenting on the first few verses of John's gospel and noting, as a good humanist, the difference of opinion about the punctuation of v.3 which persists today, Lefèvre disagrees with those who would put a full stop after the first "made" ("… without him was not anything made. That which was made in him was

[274] Annotationes Natalis Bedae theologii parisiensis in Jacobum Fabrum Stapulensem libri duo: et in Desiderium Erasmum Roterdamum liber unus (Paris, 1526) quoted in D. P. walker, "Origène en France au Début du XVIe Siècle," in *Courants Religieux et Humanistes à la fin du XVe et au debut du XVIe siècle (Colloque de Strasbourg, 9–11 May 1957)*, Presses Universitaires de France (1959), 110–111.
[275] Rice, "Humanist Idea," 131.

life…") on the ground that it sounds too Platonist.[276] Significantly, Lefèvre adds that, in Scripture, we must look for Christian truth, not platonic truth.[277]

In addition to this, one aspect of Lefèvre's piety seems to point toward a profound conversion: his gradual, but unquestionable rejection of the intercession of the saints. If Lefèvre was driven mainly by fear or philosophical considerations, it would have been easy for him to maintain that private devotion. However, his attachment to the Word of God and rejection of the saints is linked in his mind. Many passages could be adduced in that sense but this extract from his 1523 preface to the four gospels is clear: "The Word of God is enough (*Verbum Dei Sufficit*). This alone is enough to effect life everlasting. This rule is the guide to eternal life. All else, on which the Word of God does not shine, is as unnecessary as it is undoubtedly superfluous."[278]

Guillaume Farel has left us a precious first-hand account of Lefèvre's superstition and how he gradually overcame it and came to evangelical convictions concerning worship. Unlike Erasmus, how wrote a scathing critique of superstition and devotion to the saints in his Enchiridion but continued the practice in a spiritualised way, Lefèvre came to a complete rejection. Farel's testimony on this is clear. In his "*Epitre à tous Seigneurs*" of 1523 in which he describes his own conversion, Farel maps out Lefèvre's own evolution from complete superstition when he met him sometime between 1508 and 1512 to questioning the practice and total rejection: "I found the worst of idolaters; for I had never seen someone singing mass more reverently… Jacques Faber made the humblest reverence to images than anyone I have ever met, praying and saying his hours for a long time on his knees in front of them… but having understood the great idolatry involved in prayer to the saints and that their legend acts

[276] i.e., the fact that the idea of all things was in the logos before their creation.
[277] "Et quid nobis, si altera distinction Platonicis magis arrideat: Nam Christiana prosequimur, non Platonica."
[278] Preface to the commentary on the four gospels in Rice, *Prefatory Epistles*, 436.

as sulphur to stir up the fire, he left it all behind and from then on devoted himself to Sacred Scriptures."[279]

In another later work, Farel also states that Lefèvre came to reject the use of all objects in private devotion, including the cross. Reporting how Lefèvre was disturbed to find devotion shown to an ancient statue of Isis, he replaced it by a cross. Then he adds: "He had a cross set up instead of that image of Isis, thinking that he was doing well because he did not yet understand what he later understood about the idolatry that was committed about the cross."[280]

Clearly, age was a factor for Lefèvre. He was by everyone's consent advanced in years in the years 1520s and 1530s and we cannot expect the same energy as Luther. Nonetheless, there are enough elements that show a decisive evolution toward an evangelical understanding of Scripture. Despite what the majority scholarship has suggested until recently, Lefèvre's action cannot be explained simply by a mystical conception of the Christian life that led him to be uninterested in the external manifestation of piety and the church as an institution.

5.3 Strategy?

Various elements suggest that the theological distinctive of the Epistles and Gospels are dictated by strategic consideration that we have already identified, i.e., reforming the church from the inside with the protection of Marguerite de Navarre.

Let us say a word about Lefèvre himself again. I argue that, whilst Lefèvre theology was certainly influenced by his humanistic training and mystical slant, from the early 1520s his theology reflects a deliberate reforming strategy in accordance with the Navarrian Network's vision. In what remains the most substantial study of Levfere's theology, Henry Heller argues that Lefèvre's theology evolved toward an unmistakably Lutheran direction and

[279] Farel, *Du Vrai Usage de la Croix*, 129.
[280] Farel, *Du Vrai Usage de la Croix*, 130.

was decidedly unorthodox from the mid-1520s.[281] He also notes that: "Lefèvre's interest in Cusa's philosophy, which was reflected more or less distinctly in his evangelical commentaries, does, however, appear to contradict the very strong fundamentalism also to be found in the same work and which in fact approaches Luther's principle of *sola scriptura*."[282]

Whilst Lefèvre is often compared to Erasmus, there are interesting differences between the two men which are obvious for all to see. One is Lefèvre's fondness for the monastic life. In the early part of his life, he was significantly influenced by mystics, in particular the pseudo-graphical works of Denys the Areopagite. Under their influence, Lefèvre seriously considered withdrawing to a monastery. He did not do so for various reasons, mainly because he did not want to abandon his scholarly activities. However, the desire remained with him ever after and, unlike most other humanists, he kept a close relationship with mystics influenced by the *Devotio Moderna*.[283] This is an interesting difference from Erasmus: Erasmus was a monk by necessity who did all he could to escape from the monastic life, whereas Lefèvre was a secular scholar who longed all his life for the monastic life. Lefèvre's intense piety struck his contemporaries. As Luther wrote to a friend in 1517, "I am afraid Erasmus does not exalt Christ and God's grace enough and in this he is much more ignorant than Lefèvre."[284] That piety recognised by all and his humanistic training went hand in hand with a reforming desire that is markedly absent in his Dutch counterpart. It is not by chance that he accepted to join Briçonnet in Meaux for a reforming project, something that Erasmus would never have done.

One word that was used to define Lefèvre's theology is "Christiformitas." In many ways it is akin to the devotio moderna of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, summed up

[281] See, Henry Heller, "The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Etaples: 1525," *Studies in the Renaissance*, vol.19 (1972).
[282] Henry Heller, "Nicholas of Cusa and Early French Evangelism," *Archive for Reformation History* vol.63 (1972), 18.
[283] For Lefèvre and mysticism, see Jean Dagens, "Humanisme et Évangélisme chez Lefèvre d'Étaples," in *Courants Religieux et Humanisme à la Fin du XVe et au début du XVIe siècle*, 121–34.
[284] D. Martin Luthers Werke, *Briefwechsel*, 12 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009), 1:90.

in Thomas A Kempis's famous work "The imitation of Christ." However, Lefèvre goes further than the mere idea of imitating Christ in our conduct. Inspired by Galatians 4.19, Lefèvre talks about a spiritual transformation that involves our entire person. A great summary is found in a pithy statement in preface to the second part of the French New Testament: "Let us go to Jesus Christ in all faith. Let him be our thought, our speaking, our life, our salvation, our all. God the Father gave him to us to live in him, by him and by his word."[285]

Lefèvre's reforming ambition was clearly expressed by the group of Meaux itself. A little-known text published from Meaux shows how self-conscious they were as a group and how determined they were to pursue their reforming agenda. This is the short work called "*Brief recueil de la substance de la doctrine évangelique*," published before November 1529 by Simon Dubois as a preface to the four gospels in French. This is the adaptation of Luther's second preface to his Advent Postils of 1522 translated in Latin by Martin Bucer.[286] In the preface dated 25 September 1525 the anonymous writer promises to the flock in Meaux that, as they face persecution and preaching is no longer possible, evangelical ministers would not abandon them but they would continue providing for them through publishing books. On the same day Roussel expresses the same thought to Farel.[287]

A perceptive reader who did not know that this preface was an adaptation from Luther would guess it from three clues: first, the author clearly divides Scripture in two parts – law and gospel – as Luther would typically do. The first part is there to "humiliate creatures and show them their ignorance, powerlessness and sin." Moses "commands and sometimes threatens" whereas the apostles "exhort and beseech". The second clue which is a clear insistence on man's sin and depravity and the fact that he is under the wrath of God when outside Christ. The third clue is a long paragraph on the difference between faith and charity,

[285] Preface dated 6 November 1523 ("To all Christian men and woman") in Rice, *Prefaces*, 461.
[286] Rice, *Prefaces*, no.146.
[287] Herminjard *Correspondance des Réformateurs,* 1:390.

the two cardinal virtues, clarifying that only faith justify and that charity is only a confirmation of faith. It contains memorable statements that are typical of Luther:

> Faith grants us everything; charity communicates it to our neighbour. By faith, Jesus Christ is made food to us for eternal life; by charity, we are food to our neighbour for his salvation and edification. By faith we are made knives; charity uses the knife… therefore faith justifies man and makes him a Christian; charity declares him a Christian for the good of his neighbour.[288]

Marguerite:

Another element that confirms the strategic choice of the so-called "Navarrian network" is the role of Marguerite de Navarre herself in protecting evangelicals and favouring the Reformation in France. Many twentieth century scholars (mostly Roman Catholic) described her as a mystic with inconsistent theological views and ultimately reluctant to choose between the traditional theology and the new Lutheran ideas.[289] However, her writings and behaviours clearly point into a reforming direction. Many examples of her active but discreet support to the evangelical cause could be given. The clearest one is perhaps filling the university of Bourges with Lutheran from 1527 when her brother granted her the Duchy of Berry for her marriage to Henri de Navarre. The most famous of those Lutheran professors was Melchior Wolmar who had a decisive influence on both Calvin and Beza in 1529.[290] However, what is particularly striking is that her evangelical zeal was common knowledge at the time. In October 1533, a stage play was given to an audience of professors and students at the College de Navarre at the University of Paris. John Calvin, a 24-year-old student who had come to study biblical languages and classics describes the play in a letter to his friend Francois Daniel. This is the earliest autograph we have from Calvin: "A woman sits in her bedroom sewing, occupying herself with domestic activities appropriate to her sex. Suddenly, she is confronted by *Megaera*, a Greek fury, who urges her to begin reading the Bible. Worked into

[288] Rice, *Prefaces*, 508.
[289] E.g., Pierre Jourda, her main biographer. Pierre Jourda, *Marguerite d'Angoulême Reine de Navarre* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1930).
[290] Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (Yale University Press, 2009), 19–20.

a frenzy, she strikes out, tormenting and oppressing all around her as she preaches her newfound knowledge."[291] This was a clear parody of Marguerite and Roussel (*Maegera* being a pun on his name Gérard) Marguerite was not amused and she had the College grand master and principal put in custody.[292]

Five years before, in 1528, the Strasbourg reformer Wolfgang Capito dedicated his commentary to Hosea to Marguerite and he wrote her striking letter in which he mentions her conversion to the evangelical faith. He gives us a fascinating account of her spiritual journey since her youth in the mid-1510s. Although Capito's intent is obviously to flatter the queen and obtain her favour, the details into which he describes her spiritual journey is remarkable and shows that he relied in information obtained from people close to her. After noting that "no one is more devoted to the reading of Holy Scripture than you are", he notes:

> You have been through the whole range of superstitions as I know from eye witnesses. Then… you devoted yourself to what is called 'contemplation of God' and you benefited from it as far as this method can bring forth good fruit. I have read myself two letters in French addressed to you in which, the writer,[293] imitating Nicola of Cusa,[294] philosophised on the essence and power of God. Experience then taught you the vanity of all these works and practices to which you had devoted yourself… I can well imagine the interior turmoil you must have been through as you felt your faith in good works and this sacred philosophy vanish… but in the end, in the midst of this darkness you saw the splendid true light and the One who is the life of the world: Jesus Christ. Jesus only, and Jesus crucified became the object of your devotion; him alone can enable you by his spirit to accomplish all good works.[295]

Even during the mystical phase to which Capito alludes, Marguerite was entirely devoted to Christ to which she usually refers to as the "only one needed" ("*Le seul nécessaire*"), alluding to Jesus' response to Martha in Luke 10.42.[296] The fact that Christ is the

[291] Quoted in Larissa Taylor, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth Century Paris* (Brill, 1999), 45.
[292] Jean Calvin to Francois Daniel, 27 October 1533, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 3:106–111.
[293] Most probably Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux.
[294] Born in 1401, died in 1464. His mystical treatises were very popular in the early sixteenth century.
[295] Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 2:121–122.
[296] Reid, *King's Sister*, 187.

"*seul nécessaire*" is the first thing she says in the first letter of her long correspondence with Briçonnet from 1521 to 1524.[297]

Capito also makes clear mention in passing to the situation of the evangelicals in France and the well-known protection many enjoyed from Marguerite. After saying that she is surrounded by many godly men who can teach her what she needs about Scripture (he mentions Roussel, d'Arende and Lefèvre by name), Capito adds: "I will not mention all those who, in the whole of France, are placed under your protection (for there are not just hornets flying in that beehive) and are sheltered from the violence of their persecutors."[298] Later in the same letter, Capito adds: "This cross (of Christ) borne by the churches secretly scattered around the land of France, is the way that leads them towards this glory that is all the more certain as the trials afflicting her new are more grievous."[299] This is confirmed by other correspondents with Marguerite over the years, for example by Martin Bucer ten years later when he encourages her to persevere in her zeal for the propagation of the gospel in France despite "the poisoned tongue of the slanderers."[300]

We know that the reforming program of what Jonathan Reid called the "Navarrian network" ultimately failed and it took the energy and vision of Calvin and his collaborators in Switzerland to spearhead the movement of Reformed churches in France in the late 1540s and early 1550s. However, it is worth pointing out that not all reformers agreed with Calvin and Farel's condemnation of the "Nicodemites" and Calvin himself seems to have evolved on the issue. Calvin initially encouraged people in France with Protestant conviction to separate from the official church, hold meetings in their own houses and ultimately leave the country, as he had done, to a place where they would be free to profess their faith. At the same time as

[297] Marguerite d'Angouleme to Guillaume Briconnet, before 19 June 1521, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 1:65.
[298] Wolfgang Capito to Marguerite de Navarre, 22 March 1528, Herminjard *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 2:122.
[299] Ibid, 122.
[300] Martin Bucer to Marguerite de Navarre, 5 July 1538, Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs*, 5:39.

when Farel and Calvin started writing against the Nicodemites (around 1536), Martin Bucer was critical of such intransigent attitude and expressed a different opinion: "There are many children of God who belong to Christ's true flock"[301] he said; they endure hardship and it is the task of the reformers to help them endure where they are.

The way Calvin perceived the situation of the church in France also seems to have somewhat changed. One event is significant in that regard: in 1561, Beza asked Calvin for advice in relation to the bishop of Troyes,[302] in north-east France, who had adhered to Reformed conviction but wanted to retain his bishopric in the Roman Catholic Church as well as his benefice. Calvin did not respond specifically but wrote a general piece of advice "For the bishops and vicars of the papacy"[303] Calvin insisted bishops must openly declare their faith, stop celebrating mass and preach the Word faithfully which may not have been possible. However, amazingly, he added that subject to these conditions, he was prepared to entertain the idea of the bishop keeping his benefice.

> Regarding the temporal goods, whether in jurisdiction or revenue, although this corruption is incompatible with the pure simplicity of the spiritual system of the church, nevertheless while things remain confused, one can out of tolerance allow them to keep them, as long as one exhorts them to distribute the goods in their hands as having been dedicated to God, not only in order to avoid profaning sacred things but also to maintain the modesty appropriate to true bishops.[304]

In fact, Beza himself admitted many years later that a Reformation "from inside" looked possible and implicitly conceded that the hope nurtured by the French reformers gathered around Marguerite and Lefèvre was not entirely without foundation. Commenting on Calvin's famous prefatory address to king Francis I in the 1536 edition of the Institutes, Beza declares:

> Had the monarch read it, I am much mistaken if a severe wound would not have been inflicted on the Babylonian prostitute. For that prince, unlike those after him, was capable of forming an opinion and had given proof of no small discernment; he was a patron of learned men, and not in himself hostile to us.[305]

---

[301] Consilium theologicum, 49, no. 234, quoted in Van Stam, "The Group of Meaux", 273.
[302] Antonio Caracciolo.
[303] CO10: col.184–87.
[304] Ibid., col.186.
[305] Theodore Beza, *Vita Calvini*, CO 21:125.

This is an indirect and belated acknowledgement that the Navarrian network's strategy made sense and that it cannot be dismissed as stemming from fear or cowardice.

Conclusion:

In his recent study on the phenomenon of Nicodemism, Michael Bruening sums up the Navarrian network: " The key feature that distinguished early French reform from its Calvinist offshoot was that its first proponents envisioned a state-sponsored, national reform that would take place within the existing French church."[306] In this study, we have shown that the Navarrian network's strategy was underpinned by a clear theological vision expounded by Lefèvre d'Etaples and his network of theologians who initially gathered in Meaux. That vision emphasised certain key Lutheran insights: the pre-eminence of Scripture over all other human authorities – including church hierarchy – and the central role of faith in salvation, as opposed to good works and intercession from the saints. This led to an implied devaluation of the role of the church institution and refutation of certain key doctrines, notably purgatory. At the same time, that vision involved toning down some of Luther's more radical insights, in particular the depravity of man and God's sovereign grace in salvation, because of the perceived tension between those doctrines and the vision of a state church reformed from the inside. We have shown this from an analysis of the Epistles and Gospels and their distinctive theological emphasis that set them apart both from late medieval homilies and from Luther's own homilies. The Epistles and Gospels homilies have also highlighted the fact that this theological vision was implemented mainly through preaching the Scriptures in French, based on the French Bible produced by Lefèvre. Finally, we have shown that this coherent vision was still visible in the 1530s through the divergent trajectories of men like Farel and Roussel

[306] Bruening, *Kissing the Slippers*, 9.

who started their reforming ministry together at Meaux before advocating a very different vision of religious reforms.

This study has contributed to highlight the central importance of preaching in the implementation of religious reform in the early sixteenth century. In particular, it highlighted the fact that the translation of Scripture in vernacular languages was always meant to be used as a tool for preaching, as we see from Lefèvre's translation of the New Testament that formed the foundation of the Epistles and Gospels. Martin Luther famously said that the church is a "mouth house, not a pen house"[307] and the Epistles and Gospels vindicate this idea.

This study has also highlighted the fact that what Farel and Calvin dismissed as "Nicodemism" was actually a more complex and ambiguous phenomenon than it looks. The phenomenon of Nicodemism has been analysed in general terms by scholars for some time. We may mention for example the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg and his pioneering study on the subject in 1970.[308] However, further study on the subject by focusing on specific individuals would be profitable. In particular, as my study has shown, Gerard Roussel has been unfairly neglected by twentieth century scholarship – falling into the crack between Rome and Geneva as it were - and his theology would require further study.

More broadly, this study has emphasised the fact that "Lutheran", "Protestant" or "Reformed" are more ambiguous labels than it may appears when it comes to defining the theology and exegesis of early sixteen century sermons. We have shown that the presence or absence of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is not enough in itself to determine whether scriptural exegesis is "Protestant" or "Reformed." The Epistles and Gospels as a whole raise the question of the criteria we use to define what is Protestant or Reformed theology or exegesis: they have been dismissed by some scholars as "moderate" or "transition" documents because they implicitly take Luther or Calvin's mature theology as the

[307] First Advent Postil (1522), LW75:51.
[308] Carlo Ginzburg, *Il Nicodemismo, Simulazione e Dissimulazione Religiosa nell'Europa del 500* (Einaudi, 1970).

benchmark of what “Protestant” theology of exegesis must look like. On the contrary, such homilies should stimulate further reflections on the theological variety visible in all those who opposed the established church in Western Europe in the 1520s and 1530s.

Bibliography

Primary sources:

Briçonnet, Guillaume et Marguerite d'Angoulême. Correspondance (1521-1524), edited by Christine Martineau et Michel Veissière. Droz, 1975.

Calvin, Jean. *Institution de la religion Chrétienne (1541)*, ed. Olivier Millet. Droz, 2008.

Calvin, John. *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*. Edited by Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss. 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 29–87. Brunswick, Germany: C. A. Schwetschke and Son, 1863–1900.

Crespin, Jean. *Le Livre des Martyrs (1554)*. Google Books.

Farel, Guillaume, *Le Pater Noster et le Credo en François*, ed. Francis Higman. Droz, 1982.

Farel, Guillaume. *Sommaire et brève déclaration d'aucun lieux fort nécessaires à chacun Chrétien pour mettre sa confiance en Dieu et aider son prochain*. 1534 reprint. Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1867.

Farel, Guillaume. *Du vrai usage de la croix de Jesus Christ de Guillaume Farel, suivi de divers écrits du même auteur*, ed. Jules-Guillaume Fick. Geneva, 1865.

Herminjard, Alphonse. *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue Française*. 9 volumes. H. Georg, 1866-1897.

Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris sous le règne de François Ier. Société de l'histoire de France. Renouard, 1854.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques, et ses disciples. *Epistres et Evangiles pour les Cinquante & Deux Sepmaines de l'An*. Edited by M.A. Screech. Droz, 1976.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques et ses disciples. *Epistres et Evangiles pour les Cinquante & Deux Dimenches de l'An*. Edited by Guy Bedouelle & Franco Giacone. Brill, 1976.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques. *Commentarii in Epistolas Pauli*. Paris, 1512. www.prdl.org.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques. *Commentarii initiatorii in quatuor Evangelia*. Basel, 1523. www.prdl.org.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques. *Commentarii in Epistolas Catholicas*. Antwerp, 1540. www.prdl.org.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques. *The prefatory epistles and related texts.* Ed. Eugene Rice. Columbia University Press, 1972.

Luther, Martin. *Church Postils*. Concordia Publishing House, 2013.

Luther, Martin. *Sermons and Church Postils*. Baker Books, 1995.

Lyra, Nicholas. *Les postilles et expositions des epistres et evangiles dominicales, aveques des festes solennelles*, trans. Pierre Desrey (1497). www.gallica.bnf.fr.

Sully, Maurice. *Exposition des Evangiles* (1522?). www.gallica.bnf.fr.

Secondary sources

Backus, Irena. « Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples : A Humanist or a Reformist View of Paul and his Theology ?" In *A Companion to Paul and the Reformation*, edited by R. Ward Holder. Brill, 2009.

Bartholomew, Craig. *Introducing Biblical hermeneutics,* Baker Academic, 2015.

Bayer, Oswald. *Martin Luther's Theology, a Contemporary Interpretation*, transl. Thomas H. Trapp. Eerdmans, 2003.

Bedouelle, Guy. *Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples ou l'intelligence des Ecritures*. Droz, 1976.

Bedouelle, Guy. "Une adaptation anglaise des epistres et evangiles de Lefèvre d'Etaples et ses disciples." *Bibliotheque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, volume 48.3 (1986): 723-734.

Blickle, Peter. "the popular Reformation." In *Handbook of European History* 1400-1600, 2 volumes, edited by T. A. Brady , H. Oberman and J. D. Tracy. Brill 1994 and 1995.

Bruening, Michael. *Refusing to kiss the slipper: opposition to Calvinism in the francophone Reformation*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Bruening, Michael. "Calvin, Farel, Roussel, and the French Nicodemites." In *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, edited by Brian C. Brewer and David M. Whitford. Brill, 2020.

Chrisman, Miriam Usher. *Strasbourg and the Reformation: a Study in the process of change.* Yale University Press, 1967.

Crane, Mark. "A scholastic response to biblical humanism: Noel Beda against Lefèvre d'Etaples and Erasmus (1526)." *Humanistica Lovaniensa*, vol.59 (2010).

Crouzet, Denis. *La Genèse de la Réforme française*. Armand Colin, 1996.

Dagens, Jean. "Humanisme et évangelisme chez Lefèvre d'Etaples, in Courants Religieux et Humanisme XV/ XVI siècles." In *Courants religieux et humanisme à la fin du XVe et au début du XVIe siècle : Colloque de Strasbourg, 9–11 mai, 1957*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1959.

De Lubac, Henri. *Exegèse Médiévale*. Aubier, 1948.

----------. "Typolologie et allégorisme." In *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 34 (1947).

Edgcumbe Hughes, Philip. *Lefèvre, Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France*. Eerdmans, 1984.

Eire, Carlos. *War against the idols – the Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin.* Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Farge, James. *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France – The Faculty of Theology of Paris 1500-1543,* Brill, 1985.

Febvre, Lucien. *Au Coeur religieux du 16è siècle*. S.E.V.P.E.N, 1957.

---------- "Une Question Mal Posée: les Origines de la Réforme Française et le Problème des Causes de la Réforme," *Revue Historique* 161 (1929).

Ginzburg,Carlo. *Il Nicodemismo, Simulazione e Dissimulazione Religiosa nell'Europa del 500.* Einaudi, 1970.

Gordon, Bruce. *Calvin.* Yale University Press, 2009.

Greengrass, Mark. *The French Reformation*. Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Harnack, Adolf von. *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan. Dover 196

Heller, Henry. *The conquest of poverty: the Calvinist revolt in sixteen century France*. Brill, 1986.

---------- "The Evangelicism of Lefèvre d'Etaples: 1525," *Studies in the Renaissance*, vol.19 (1972).

---------- "Nicholas of Cusa and Early French Evangelism," *Archive for Reformation History* vol.63 (1972)

Higman, Francis. *La diffusion de la réforme en France (1520-1565)*. Labor et Fidès, 1992.

Jourda, Pierre. "Marguerite de Navarre, Dialogue en Forme de Vision Nocturne," in *Revue du Seizième siècle*.T.13, 1926.

Knecht, Robert. *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The reign of Francis I*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Laune, Alfred. "Lefevre d'Etaples et la traduction Française de la Bible." *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, vol.32 (1895).

Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformation*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology, its Historical and Systematic Development*, Fortress Press, 2011.

Manetsch, Scott M. *Calvin's Company of Pastors*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Meylan, Henri. "Lefèvre d'Etaples, les thèmes théologiques des Epistres et Evangiles des 52 Dimanches." In *L'humanisme français au début de la Renaissance*. Colloque international de Tours. Vrin, 1973.

Oberman, Heiko. *Forerunners of the Reformation – the Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, translated by Paul L. Nyhus. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Luther the Expositor, Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings,* Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Pétremand, Jules, editor. *Guillaume Farel, Biographie Nouvelle*. Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1930.

Pettegree, Andrew. *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Potter, G. R. *Zwingli*, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Provan, Iain. *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*. Baylor University Press, 2017.

Rasmussen, Tarald. "Bridging the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Biblia Pauperum, their genre and hermeneutical significance." In *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, the history of its interpretation*, edited by Magne Sæbö. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

Reid, Jonathan. "The Meaux Group and John Calvin, in Calvin and the Early Reformation." In *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, edited by Brian C. Brewer and David M. Whitford. Brill, 2020.

Reid, Jonathan. *Queen of Dissent – Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549) and her evangelical network*. Brill, 2009.

Rice, Eugene. "The humanist idea of Christian antiquity: Lefèvre d'Etaples and his circle." In *Studies in the Renaissance*, 1962, vol.9 (1962).

Schmidt, Charles. *Gérard Roussel, prédicateur de la reine Marguerite de Navarre: Memoire servant à l'histoire des premières tentatives faites pour introduire la Réformation en France* (Schmidt and Grucker, 1845).

Stauffer, Richard. *Interprètes de la Bible – Etude sur les Réformateurs du XVIe siècle*. Editions Beauchesne, 1980.

Steinmetz, David, C. *Luther in Context*. Baker Academic, 2002.

Van Stam, Frans Pieter. "The Group of Meaux as first target of Farel and Calvin's anti-nicodemism." *Biliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, no.2 (2006), p.253-275.

Veissière, Michel. *L'évêque Guillaume Briçonnet*. Provins, Société d'histoire d'archéologie, 1986.

Vose, Heather M. "A sixteenth century assessment of the French Church in the years 1521-1524 by bishop Guillaume Briçonnet of Meaux." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 39, no.4, (October 1988).

White, Robert. "An Early Doctrinal Handbook, Farel's Summaire et Breve Declaration." *Westminster Theological Journal*, 69 (2007): 21-38.

Zuidema, Jason and Van Raalte, Theodore. *Early French Reform, the Theology and Spirituality of Guillaume Farel.* St Andrews Studies in Reformation History, Ashgate, 2011.