

Franco-German Rapprochement and Reconciliation in the Ecclesial Domain

The Meeting of Bishops in Bühl (1949) and the Congress of Speyer (1950)¹

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The Franco-German friendship is largely regarded as a prime example of the successful rapprochement of two hostile nations. Through nearly a century filled with resentments, conflicts, and wars, the so-called hereditary enmity of Germany and France developed. Rapprochement efforts, such as attempts by the politicians Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand,² or of the Catholic Marc Sangnier,³ in the interwar period ended with the emergence of National Socialism and at the latest with the outbreak of the Second World War. Incorporated into the process of European integration and partly following previous endeavours, the remarkable history of the Franco-German friendship began after this war. The new togetherness of the “coup-

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- 1 All quotations originally in German and French were translated into English by the author.
 - 2 Jacques Bariéty, *Les relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: Pedane, 1977).
 - 3 Denis Lefèvre and Marc Sangnier, *L'aventure du catholicisme social* (Paris: Mame, 2008).

le franco-allemand”⁴ became visible particularly through great symbols and in emotional gestures exhibited in the political realm. The signing of the Treaty of Friendship by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle in 1963⁵ or the handshake between Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand in 1984⁶ serve as examples of this alliance.

Right from the start, this political-diplomatic sphere was in the focus of historical research on Franco-German relations in the post-war period.⁷ However, actual efforts by French and German politicians to form an understanding with their neighbours began relatively late.⁸ In contrast, many initiatives for rapprochement from civil society started already immediately after World War II, and since the 1990s, these efforts attracted increased research interest.⁹ Institutions and organisations such as the *Deutsch-Fran-*

4 *Le couple franco-allemand en Europe*, ed. Henri Ménudier (Asnières: Inst. Allemande d’Asnières, 1993).

5 *Der Elysée-Vertrag und die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1945-1963-2003*, ed. Corine Defrance and Ulrich Pfeil (München: Oldenbourg, 2005).

6 Matti Münch, *Verdun. Mythos und Alltag einer Schlacht* (München: M-Press, 2006), 499-500.

7 Gilbert Ziebur, *Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen seit 1945. Mythen und Realitäten* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1997); Ulrich Lappenküper, *Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1949-1963. Von der ‘Erbfeindschaft’ zur ‘Entente élémentaire’* (München: Oldenbourg, 2001).

8 Renate Fritsch-Bournazel, Die Wende in der französischen Nachkriegspolitik 1945-1949: Die ‘deutsche Gefahr’ verliert die Priorität, in: *Die französische Deutschlandpolitik zwischen 1945 und 1949*, ed. Institut Français de Stuttgart (Tübingen: Attempto, 1987), 7-25; Corina Schukraft, Die Anfänge der deutschen Europapolitik in den 50er und 60er Jahren: Weichenstellungen unter Konrad Adenauer und Bewahrung des Status quo unter seinen Nachfolgern Ludwig Erhard und Kurt Georg Kiesinger, in: *Deutsche Europapolitik. Von Adenauer bis Merkel*, 2nd ed., ed. Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet et al. (Wiesbaden: VS, 2010), 13-66, here: 18.

9 The anthology of Corine Defrance et al. is a recent published example clarifying the extent of the efforts of civil society on Franco-German rapprochement: *Wege der Verständigung zwischen Deutschen und Franzosen nach 1945. Zivilgesellschaftliche Annäherungen*, ed. Corine Defrance et al. (Tübingen: Attempto,

zösisches Institut (Franco-German Institute) in Ludwigsburg¹⁰ or the *Comité français d'échanges avec l'Allemagne nouvelle* (French Committee for Exchange with the New Germany)¹¹ were established at the end of the 1940s. Moreover, since then numerous town twinnings¹² and countless youth meetings¹³ took place to bring French and German people into a closer understanding of each other. Franco-German journal projects¹⁴ or the role of prisoners of war and of former soldiers¹⁵ also played an essential role in the Franco-German rapprochement. All these initiatives began significantly prior to political efforts and served politicians as starting bases and points of contact.¹⁶

2010); Defrance, Société civile et relations franco-allemandes, in: *Wege der Verständigung*, 17-31, here: 17.

10 *Projekt deutsch-französische Verständigung. Die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft am Beispiel des Deutsch-Französischen Instituts in Ludwigsburg*, ed. Hans Manfred Bock (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998).

11 Carla Albrecht, Das Comité français d'échanges avec l'Allemagne nouvelle als Wegbereiter des Deutsch-Französischen Jugendwerks, *Lendemains* 27 (2002), 177-189.

12 Manfred Bock, Europa von unten. Zu den Ursprüngen und Anfängen der deutsch-französischen Gemeindepartnerschaften, in: *Gemeindepartnerschaften im Umbruch Europas*, ed. Annette Jünemann et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: P. Lang, 1994), 13-35; Corine Defrance, Les premiers jumelages franco-allemands, 1950-1963, *Lendemains* 21 (1996), 83-95.

13 Kirsten Hoyer, Deutsche Jugendorganisationen und deutsch-französische Jugendkontakte in der Nachkriegszeit 1945-1955 – ein Überblick, *Lendemains* 21 (1996), 110-125.

14 René Wintzen, Private und persönliche Initiativen in der französischen Besatzungszone. Die Zeitschriften Documents und Dokumente, Vent debout und Verger, in: *Französische Kulturpolitik in Deutschland 1945-1949. Berichte und Dokumente*, ed. Jérôme Vaillant (Konstanz: UVK, 1984), 143-151.

15 Francois Cochet, Le rôle des anciens prisonniers et des anciens déportés français dans le rapprochement franco-allemand, in: *Le rôle des guerres dans la mémoire des Européens*, ed. Antoine Fleury and Robert Frank (Neuchâtel: P. Lang, 1997), 123-135.

16 Defrance, Société civile, 24; Albrecht, Comité français.

Although there is now substantial research about many actors and groups favouring the Franco-German friendship, the churches and church-related groups remained largely unexplored.¹⁷ This lack of attention is astonishing because the churches played a crucial role in the German situation after 1945. After the war, they were the only functioning organisations and the only institutions that were not regarded as politically compromised. They were engaged in societal and political tasks, were dialogue partners of the allies, and were advocates and benefactors to the German population.¹⁸ At the same time, varied initiatives for the Franco-German rapprochement came from the ecclesial sphere on both sides of the Rhine, as Joseph Zouame-Bizeme concludes:

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- 17 One volume of the journal *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* (KZG 14, 2001/2) deals with the relations between German and French Protestants and Catholics in the 19th and 20th century. Further examples are: Martin Greschat, *Widerstand und Versöhnung. Der Beitrag des europäischen Protestantismus zur Annäherung der Völker*, in: *Christliches Ethos und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Europa*, ed. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Joachim Mehlhausen (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995), 139-144; Frédéric Hartweg and Daniela Heimerl, *Der französische Protestantismus und die "Deutsche Frage" 1945-1955*, part 1 and 2, *KZG* 3, 1 (1990), 386-412, *KZG* 4, 1 (1991), 202-235; Michael Kißener, *Ein "ragendes Denkmal" des christlichen Abendlandes. Der Bau der Friedenskirche in Speyer 1953/4*, *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 9 (2008), 93-106; Michael Kißener, *Boten eines versöhnten Europa? Deutsche Bischöfe, Versöhnung der Völker und Europaidee nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in: *Die europäische Integration und die Kirchen. Akteure und Rezipienten*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Malgorzata Morawiec (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 53-72; Michael Kißener, *Der Katholizismus und die deutsch-französische Annäherung in den 1950er Jahren*, in: *Wege der Verständigung*, 89-98; Joseph Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects des relations religieuses franco-allemandes de 1945 à 1955* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 1990).
- 18 Michael Strobel, *Kirchen und Besatzungsmächte in der deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945-1949* (Tübingen: Universität Tübingen, 1992), 1, 76, 146; Martin Greschat, *Protestanten in der Zeit. Kirche und Gesellschaft in Deutschland vom Kaiserreich bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 180-183.

“The churches of France and Germany were the avant-garde of the policy of German reconstruction. In doing so, they undertook different projects of the Franco-German reconciliation and different efforts to create peace in the world.”¹⁹

Individuals such as the Jesuit, Jean du Rivau,²⁰ who set up the *Bureau International de Liaison et de Documentation* (International Office for Liaison and Documentation), or the pastor Georges Casalis²¹ in Berlin worked towards reconciliation between the French and the Germans. Face to face with them on the German side stood Lothar Kreyssig, the founder of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* (Action Reconciliation),²² or Bishop Isidor Emmanuel,²³ who took an active part in the building of the *Friedenskirche St. Bernhard* (St. Bernhard Peace Church) between 1953 and 1954 in Speyer.

In the middle and in contact with these individuals were Robert Picard de la Vacquerie and Marcel Sturm,²⁴ the French chief military chaplains in both Germany and Austria.²⁵ Picard de la Vacquerie (1893-1969) was or-

19 Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects*, 372.

20 René Wintzen, L'influence de personnalités, d'institutions et d'initiatives privées sur la politique culturelle française en Allemagne après 1945, in: *Frankreichs Kulturpolitik in Deutschland, 1945-1950*, ed. Franz Knipping and Jacques Le Rider (Tübingen: Attempto, 1987), 335-348; Emmanuelle Picard, Le rôle des Catholiques français dans le rapprochement franco-allemand après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, *KZG* 14, 2 (2001), 513-532.

21 Kurt Anschutz, “Der ökumenische Glaube ist primär...”. Georges Casalis in Berlin 1946-1950 – Einblicke in seine Korrespondenz, *Evangelische Theologie* 54 (1994), 79-101.

22 See the contribution by Christiane Wienand in this volume.

23 Kißener, Ein ragendes Denkmal, 93-106.

24 Marcel Sturm and Robert Picard de la Vacquerie are the focus of my dissertation in process. One aspect of the dissertation is presented in this article.

25 There is no study on Robert Picard de la Vacquerie and there are only some articles about Marcel Sturm. Jörg Thierfelder and Michael Losch, Der evangelische “Feldbischof” Marcel Sturm – ein “Brückenbauer” zwischen den evangelischen Christen Deutschlands und Frankreichs, *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* 99 (1999), 208-251; Martin Greschat, Marcel Sturm: l'église évangélique en Allemagne depuis mai 1945, *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 21, 4 (1989), 567-575; Christophe Baginski, Zuerst Christ, dann

dained as a Catholic priest in 1921, after which he held various clerical offices in several Parisian parishes. He was also interested in international exchanges. In 1944 he was arrested by the Gestapo for his critical sermons but was later liberated by the allies. Between 1946 and 1951 he was stationed in Germany. In 1951, the Pope enthroned him as bishop of Orléans where he died in 1969.²⁶ Sturm (1905-1950) was a protestant reformed pastor in South-Alsace from 1929 to 1939 and was affiliated with the ecumenical movement. In World War II, he was injured and captured by the Germans, but was able to escape to North Africa. In 1945, he began his duties in Germany where he died five years later.²⁷

As chief military chaplains in the French occupied zones of Germany and Austria,²⁸ Robert Picard de la Vacquerie and Marcel Sturm were responsible to their respective church leadership and to General Pierre Koenig, the French supreme commander in Germany and director of the military government. Their engagement in Germany branched out in four directions that were interrelated to each other: First, Picard de la Vacquerie and Sturm had to attend to the pastoral care of the French in Germany and the Germans in French war captivity.²⁹ Second, they acted as special consultants in religious questions for General Koenig. In this respect, they had a certain influence on the French church policy.³⁰ For example they handled matters

Franzose. "Militärbischof" Sturm setzt sich für die Versöhnung ein, *Evangelischer Kirchenbote. Sonntagsblatt für die Pfalz* 36 (1995). However, there is no broad analysis of his engagement in Germany and his efforts on rapprochement.

26 Xavier Boniface, Picard de la Vacquerie (Robert), in: *Dictionnaire des évêques de France au XXe siècle*, ed. Dominique-Marie Dauzet and Frédéric Le Moigne (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 528-529.

27 Thierfelder and Losch, *Feldbischof*, 210-214.

28 In 1949 the authority of both *aumôniers inspecteurs* was expanded to Austria and the Saarland. Xavier Boniface, *L'aumônerie militaire française (1914-1962)* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 427.

29 Martin Greschat, Die Kirchenpolitik der französischen Besatzungsmacht in Rheinland-Pfalz, in: *Beati qui custodiunt. Festschrift für Ekkehard Kätsch zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Holger Bogs et al. (Darmstadt: Verlag der Hessischen Kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung, 2001), 175-188, here: 179.

30 Jörg Thierfelder, Die Besatzungsmacht Frankreich und die evangelischen Kirchen in der französischen Zone. Fälle und Konflikte, *Revue d'Allemagne et des*

of education policy³¹ or the discharge of the Germans as prisoners of war³². Therefore, they often became “intermediaries” between the military government and the local churches, in which they actively engaged themselves on the behalf of the Germans.³³ Within these activities, the two chaplains were thirdly representatives of their churches and tried to realize the interests of those in Germany.³⁴ Last but not least they were engaged in favour of the rapprochement between the French and the Germans.

Picard de la Vacquerie and Sturm had a special impact on Franco-German reconciliation in the ecclesial domain after the Second World War. Contemporary witnesses thanked them, deeming them “bridge builders” of the international understanding.³⁵ Their approaches were diverse and partly connected with other initiatives.³⁶ Both military chaplains looked for personal contact with their German counterpart, and were important contact persons for the French and the Germans. They endorsed the concerns of the German churches towards the French authorities, and moderated between both interests. Their pioneering work³⁷ also included the organisation of reconciliation-motivated get-togethers of the French and the Germans.

pays de langue allemande 21, 4 (1989), 557-566, here: 560; Jörg Thierfelder, *Die Kirchenpolitik der Besatzungsmacht Frankreich und die Situation der evangelischen Kirche in der französischen Zone*, *KZG* 2, 1 (1989), 221-238, here: 227.

31 Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects*, 215-216, 329; Greschat, *Kirchenpolitik*, 185.

32 Thierfelder and Losch, *Feldbischof*, 236; Christophe Baginski, *Frankreichs Kirchenpolitik im besetzten Deutschland 1945-1949* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 2001), 51.

33 Boniface, *L'aumônerie militaire*, 430-431.

34 Thierfelder and Losch, *Feldbischof*, 214; Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects*, 328.

35 Evangelisches Kirchenblatt, *Nachruf Bender*, 114, Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz (hereafter: ZAPf), Abt. 150.47, Nr. 814, Blatt 60; Rauch to Picard de la Vacquerie, 25 October 1951, Erzbischöfliches Archiv Freiburg (hereafter: EAF), Nb 9/8 Vol. III.

36 For example, Picard de la Vacquerie assisted Jean du Rivau with his center in Offenburg; Boniface, *L'aumônerie militaire*, 431. Georges Casalis reported to Sturm in Baden-Baden; Anschütz, *Der ökumenische Glaube*, 82.

37 Boniface, *L'aumônerie militaire*, 433.

Two of these gatherings are particularly noteworthy as examples of how actors of the ecclesial domain engaged in favour of Franco-German rapprochement – the Meeting of Bishops in Bühl in 1949 and the Congress of Speyer in 1950. Due to the constant commitments of Robert Picard de la Vacquerie and Marcel Sturm, French and German catholic bishops and Protestants from both countries were brought together to become acquainted and to gain a mutual understanding of each other's missions and thoughts. In the following I will describe and analyse these two meetings in detail. While in a first step both meetings will be presented separately, they are compared in a second step to point out the similarities as well as the differences between these Catholic and Protestant approaches. I will ask for the outcomes and impacts of these meetings, and whether these meetings were successful. Special attention will be given to the specific meaning of rapprochement and reconciliation in the ecclesial context and therefore to the question what these concepts actually meant in these cases.

THE MEETING OF FRENCH AND GERMAN BISHOPS IN BÜHL (1949)

The meeting in Bühl had its forerunners in the successful pastoral congresses of French, Austrian, and German priests in 1947 and 1948.³⁸ At the end of 1948, Robert Picard de la Vacquerie saw the moment to address a higher ecclesiastical level. He asked archbishop Wendelin Rauch from Freiburg to provide assistance with a meeting between French and German bishops.³⁹ Rauch who agreed to his colleague's idea believed his church committed to such initiatives:

“Certainly, the Catholic Church might be the first power that allows for the idea of the entity of peoples across borders and the respective actual situation to become visible and put it effectively in the world. And this out of her inmost nature. Through

38 Rapport de Picard sur la Rencontre Episcopale Franco-Allemande de Buhl (Bade), Archives de l'Évêché d'Orléans (hereafter: EO), 3 Z 58.

39 Picard to Rauch, 20 December 1948, EAF, Nb 9/70, Vol. I.

her proper supernatural charge, she has most important forces to bring in and to provide for understanding, for unity, and for peace.”⁴⁰

The meeting received the agreement and mercy of Pope Pius XII and the benevolent consent of the French government and of the occupying authorities.⁴¹ Despite facilitations from the French agencies,⁴² the meeting should be independent of the occupation, free and not imposed upon by any side.⁴³

In Bühl, it was to be a “private meeting” “for the understanding of both peoples” at which the participants mainly became acquainted with each other.⁴⁴ From 24 to 26 September 1949 fourteen bishops from the French zone of occupation in Germany and from several parts of France came together, amongst them the archbishops of Besancon and Freiburg, Maurice Dubourg and Wendelin Rauch.⁴⁵ They started with lunch at the house of Picard de la Vacquerie in Baden-Baden. Towards the evening, the conference was opened by a blessing meditation and speeches at the convent of Maria Hilf (Bühl). During the next days, lectures were given on church-related and religious questions and on theological tasks.⁴⁶ Jean-Julien Weber⁴⁷ and Joseph Wendel⁴⁸ spoke about previous and new developments of the formation of the clergy in both countries. Maurice Dubourg⁴⁹ and Karl-Joseph Leiprecht⁵⁰ reported the social movements of the Catholic Church in France

40 Rauch to Picard, 24 March 1949, EAF, Nb 9/6, Vol. I.

41 Montini to Picard, 22 January 1949, EO, 3 Z 58; Rauch and Dubourg to Pope Pius XII, EO, 3 Z 58.

42 Picard to Schuman, 10 November 1949, EO, 3 Z 60.

43 Rapport de Picard sur la Rencontre Episcopale Franco-Allemande; Montini to Picard, 22 January 1949, both in: EO, 3 Z 58.

44 Rauch to Rusch, 28 April 1949, EO, 3 Z 58.

45 See for participants: Teilnehmerliste, Erzbischöfliches Archiv München Freising (hereafter: EAMFr), 220, 21/1950.

46 Wendel to Muench, 31 January 1950, EAMFr, 220, 21/1950.

47 Les études ecclésiastiques et la formation des clercs dans les Séminaire de France, EAF, Nb 9/6, Vol. I.

48 Le recrutement des nos séminaires – nos soucis nos espoirs, EO, 3 Z 58.

49 Die französische katholische Aktion und ihre spezialisierten Bewegungen, EAF, Nb 9/6, Vol. I.

50 La jeunesse catholique et son organisation en Allemagne, EO, 3 Z 59.

and Germany in retrospect and in relation to the actual situation. The content of the lecture by Albert Stohr was the liturgical commission of the bishop conference of Fulda.⁵¹ Léon-Albert Terrier showed the development of theological work in the last ten to fifteen years in France.⁵² Finally, Wilhelm Kempf spoke about the problem of the German refugees with respect to the consequential religious effects at his diocese.⁵³ The congress ended with a final meditation. For between times there were occasions for discussion and prayers.⁵⁴

The topics that were covered in Bühl had no political content. Thus, the bishops could circumvent any possible difficulties and would not produce much furor. By remaining in the pure ecclesiastic-religious domain they dealt with issues, which were interesting to both sides. The several topics were not covered systematically, but rather the lectures answered the purpose to inform the assembled church leadership about the present conditions in both countries. In this way, they could recognise the situations they were in and the problems each of them had, which were in parts similar. They learned new insights, bringing about enrichment for all.⁵⁵ At the end of the meeting, there were no resolutions or common guidelines for further procedures and acts. The reason for this was, as bishop Wendel explained, that “no conference of bishops took part, but rather a personal encounter and exchange. In fact it was also a real and brotherly gathering in the entity of our holy Church.”⁵⁶ Mainly, the encounter should serve the bishops to become acquainted with each other. In the foreground of this congress was the goal to learn more about the practices in the other country, and to exchange ideas. Here it was possible for former strangers to create trust, and

51 Das Liturgische Referat der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz, EO, 3 Z 59.

52 Die gegenwärtige theologische Arbeit in Frankreich, EAF, Nb 9/6, Vol. I.

53 Problèmes Actuels de la Misère Allemande, EO, 3 Z 59.

54 Konferenz deutscher und französischer Bischöfe im Kloster ‘Maria Hilf’, Bühl, vom 24. bis 26. Oktober 1949, in: Das Kloster Maria Hilf, ed. Wilhelm Freischlag (Bühl: Discher, 1959), 25-28; Programme de la Rencontre franco-allemande des Evêques, Dom- und Diözesanarchiv Mainz (hereafter: DDAMz), Bestand 45, 1, Nr. 10; Bericht, EO, 3 Z 58.

55 Wendel to Muench, 31 January 1950, EAMFr, 220, 21/1950; Presse-Kommunique, EO, 3 Z 58.

56 Wendel to Muench, 31 January 1950, EAMFr, 220, 21/1950.

in so doing, they could establish a solid basis for further steps. With respect to these actions in particular, Michael Kißener, who analyses in his research the role of Catholics on the Franco-German rapprochement, deemed the congress successful.⁵⁷ The common bond created by the Christian faith was also important for this meeting. It set the foundation for the good relationship, and helped with facilitating understanding and rapprochement. Thus, the unity of the church, the fraternal gathering of French and Germans, and the very Christian idea of reconciliation were accentuated by the bishops and were experienced at the meeting. Rauch stressed to his colleague, Dubourg, that all had felt in Bühl that “the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love and understanding, is the best interpreter”.⁵⁸ In a report on the meeting Picard de la Vacquerie explicated further:

“It is even to underline that the principal charm of the meeting consists in the honest openness, in the effort to understand each other, in the cordial simplicity of the liaison between all participants. Nothing separated the bishops, not even the language.”⁵⁹

According to the bishops, the meeting would also have positive effects on further sectors. The relations established in Bühl had, as Picard de la Vacquerie noted, a real benefit for Germany, France, and the Catholic Church.⁶⁰ On the one hand they could “serve the policy of rapprochement of our two countries”⁶¹ and on the other hand, as Bishop Dubourg believed, they could strengthen the connections of Catholicism “that might unify us in Christ. It is also an effective contribution to the establishment of a peace that might be not only human, but primarily Christian [...]”.⁶² Such meetings as in Bühl were understood as essential ways of Franco-German reconciliation and the task of the church was to support the basic idea of the togetherness of the peoples in the world.

57 Kißener, *Boten eines versöhnten Europa*, 64-65.

58 Rauch to Dubourg, 29 November 1950, EAF, Nb 9/8, Vol. III.

59 Rapport de Picard sur la Rencontre Episcopale Franco-Allemande, EO, 3 Z 58.

60 Picard to Rauch, 5 November 1949, EAF, Nb 9/6, Vol. I.

61 Picard to Robert Schuman, 10 November 1949, EO, 3 Z 60.

62 Dubourg to Rauch, 7 November 1950, EAF, Nb 9/7, Vol. II.

According to the opinion of all participants, the basis for a long-term relationship was now built with the meeting of Bühl. For example, Picard de la Vacquerie wrote to Rauch: “You may be convinced that the mental bridges that are now tied up on the stable foundation of Christian love will not break down at any time.”⁶³

How far the bridges that were built between the French and Germans actually persist in the aftermath of this meeting is difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, further meetings were contemplated and requested by both sides.⁶⁴ However, in the sources little or no evidence can be found. Some exceptions are the letters of condolence by the bishops Weber and Dubourg on the occasion of the death of Heinrich Metzroth who had also participated at the meeting in Bühl. The letters suggest that at least some participants stayed in contact also after the meeting.⁶⁵ In addition, the effect of this first encounter between French and German bishops should not be limited to solely the church leadership. Bishop Dubourg and Rauch would lobby for a Franco-German rapprochement also towards their priests and believers. Furthermore, there was an exchange created between seminarians of Besancon and Trier in 1950.⁶⁶ Thus, the success of the meeting was mainly in the contacts of the bishops there. Except for the affiliated of Dubourg⁶⁷ there was little measurable effect beyond the conference.

63 Rauch to Picard, 25 October 1951, EAF, Nb 9/8, Vol. III.

64 Rapport de Picard sur la Rencontre Episcopale Franco-Allemande; Picard to Francois-Poncet, 3 November 1949, both in: EO, 3 Z 58; Wendel to Muench, 31 January 1950, EAMFr, 220, 21/1950.

65 Weber to Bornewasser, 22 January 1951; Dubourg to Bornewasser, 24 January 1951, both in: Bistumsarchiv Trier (hereafter: BAT), 84, 907.

66 Dubourg to Rauch, 7 November 1950, EAF, Nb 9/7, Vol. II; Rapport de Picard sur la Rencontre Episcopale Franco-Allemande, EO, 3 Z 58.

67 He also launched an exhibition on the Catholic Germany, which depicted the attitude of the German church during the Third Reich and described the German church and political life. Dubourg to Rauch, 7 November 1950, annex: L'Allemagne catholique, EAF, Nb 9/7, Vol. II.

THE CONGRESS OF FRENCH AND GERMAN PROTESTANTS IN SPEYER (1950)

The Congress of Speyer⁶⁸ had its origins in prior contacts between the French and German Protestants.⁶⁹ It traced back to the initiative of Marcel Sturm who received assistance mainly from the German side.⁷⁰ The first discussions about the gathering took place at a meeting in June 1948 at which Marc Boegner, the president of the *Fédération Protestante de France* (Protestant Federation of France), and Sturm came together with German representatives of the church.⁷¹ According to the French, the content of the Speyer meeting should have a clear political appearance and an actual vision.⁷² They thought about involving laymen as much as possible⁷³ and wished to associate with people who had been in active opposition to National Socialism.⁷⁴ Because of several setbacks, the congress could take

68 Several Aspects of the Speyer meeting are also discussed in: Martin Greschat, *Bemühungen um Verständigung und Versöhnung. Der Beitrag des französisch-deutschen Bruderrates*, in: *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 36, 2 (2004), 155-174

69 Une rencontre protestante franco-allemande à Spire (17 au 19 mars 1950), *Foi et Vie* 48 (1950), 293-294, here: 293; Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects*, 252.

70 Assistance came mainly from Martin Niemöller, the president of the *Evangelische Kirche von Hessen und Nassau* (Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau) and head of the foreign office of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (Protestant Church in Germany), and Paul Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, the director of the *Evangelisches Hilfswerk* (Protestant Aid Organization) in the French zone of occupation. Yorck to Bender, 30 July 1948, ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767; Dr. Federer to Dr. Klaus Mehnert, 10 July 1948, Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD (hereafter: ADW), Bestand ZB, Nr. 840; Bender to Niemöller, 4 August 1948, Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche in Baden (hereafter: LKAB), Bestand GA, 5880.

71 Hartweg and Heimerl, *Der französische Protestantismus*, 405.

72 Yorck to Gerstenmaier, 26 June 1948, ADW, ZB, 840.

73 Französisch-deutsche Kirchentagung, September 1949, Speyer, ADW, ZB, 840.

74 Yorck to Bender, 30 July 1948, ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767. This obsession with the Confessing Church provoked critics on the German side. Especially the chairman of the church in Baden Julius Bender was aware of a danger for the

place not until March 1950.⁷⁵ They met on a private and unofficial level without the participation of state authorities and the nomination of official church representatives. An “ecclesial meeting between the French and the Confessing Churches” should be reached at the conference and a “programme of a common function for the pacification of the occidental peoples” should be developed.⁷⁶

From 17 to 19 March 1950 approximately 50 people from both countries met in Speyer. They were actors of the church on all levels, theologians, and laymen. The majority of the group was connected to the church in some way, but personalities of society, economy, and politics were also present. The German participants not only came from the French zone of occupation but also from all over Germany. They were nearly exclusively associated with the *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church). The majority of the French had been members of the *résistance*.⁷⁷

At the conference they discussed the political responsibility of the church and the possibilities of a Franco-German rapprochement. For this purpose Heinrich Vogel, professor of theology in Berlin, Charles Westphal, director of the Protestant journal *Foi et Vie*, Hans Iwand from the Protestant Department at Göttingen University, and René Courtin from the Department of Law in Paris gave lectures. Vogel supposed that the church was responsible for the human community, especially for disenfranchised people. In doing so, she will act by proclaiming the truth of the Word of God. Westphal referred to the responsibility of the church for all human activities. By preaching the Gospel the church must uphold the respect for the divine sovereignty and thus the respect of the human person. Furthermore,

union of the Protestant Church in Germany. For more see: Bender to Niemöller, 4 August 1948, LKAB, GA, 5880; Aktennotiz über Besprechung in Bad Gleisweiler, 8 December 1949, Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, Archivstelle Düsseldorf (hereafter: AEKiR-D), Handakten Präses Held 6 HA 004, Heft 352.

75 Aktennotiz über Besprechung in Bad Gleisweiler, 8 December 1949, AEKiR-D, Held 6 HA 004, 352.

76 Presse-Communiqué zur Speyrer Tagung; Yorck to Stempel, 20 January 1950, both in: ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767.

77 See for participants: Teilnehmerliste für Speyrer Tagung I + II, ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767.

the church should act as ambassador for the reconciliation of nations and peoples. Iwand spoke about the present danger of the restoration in Europe. To stand against this danger and for peace among peoples, one had to look on Jesus Christ and his message of reconciliation. In order to reach better mutual comprehension, the particularities of peoples that were conserved in the nations should be explored. Courtin explained that nowadays the focus should no longer be on Franco-German antagonism, but rather on the existence of the whole of Europe. Today the message of the brotherhood of all human beings could be successful. The most important task of the churches would be to facilitate mutual meetings between the Germans and the French.⁷⁸ Although these topics had a deep reference to the Christian message, they also related to the more 'secular' tasks of the church. If the lectures remained relatively theoretical and abstract, behavior guidelines for the churches allowed for the deduction of political questions and international understanding. They assigned a political responsibility for the actual events in the world to the church. The churches should especially be committed to the rapprochement of Germany and France. To this end, Courtin and Iwand made proposals that were partially included in the adopted common declaration.

The lectures were discussed by the plenum and the "most delicate political questions" were debated "without reserves". Thus, they talked about the question of the Saar, the division of Germany, issues of war criminals, and the reconstruction of Europe. In accordance with the press release, the discussions were handled "in absolute openness"; divisive questions were solved in spiritual liberty and based on the common faith. Disagreement was "less between the two partners as within the respective delegations". The influence of Marcel Sturm on the success of the congress was also highly accentuated.⁷⁹

78 See the following articles in *Foi et Vie*, 48 (1950): Une rencontre protestante franco-allemande à Spire (17 au 19 mars 1950), 293-294; Heinrich Vogel, La responsabilité politique actuelle de l'église, 317-326; Charles Westphal, Responsabilité politique de l'église, 327-338; Hans Iwand, Que peuvent faire les églises pour le rapprochement franco-allemand?, 339-358; René Courtin, Sur la contribution des églises à la compréhension franco-allemande, 359-369.

79 Une rencontre protestante franco-allemande à Spire, 294; Presse-Communiqué zur Speyrer Tagung, ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767; Report Wehr for Sturm, Ar-

Through the time spent together and through the intense discussions in Speyer, both sides had a chance to become acquainted with each other on an equal level, to understand each other's points of view and to revise any existing prejudices. Together they worked out a program for the formation of a common future. At the end it was published in the Declaration of Speyer with concrete proposals for the collaboration of the churches with respect to the Franco-German rapprochement. In this official declaration, they stated, that they met "in the spirit of the ecumenical movement". The aim was to recognize "together the political responsibility" of the churches and to contribute to the "mutual rapprochement" of Germany and France. The Christian faith was mentioned as an essential starting point and condition of rapprochement and finally reconciliation of both peoples:

"In the belief in Jesus Christ, they find their unity and the reconciliation which God keeps ready for all humans and all peoples. Such an obedience in faith let them relate the validity of the divine promise also to the understanding and reconciliation of peoples."⁸⁰

From the outset, the faith formed a common and cross-border bond; it stood over secular disputes and acted as an intermediary. Thus, Protestants from both countries were brought together. They acted jointly, cultivated solidarity, and contributed significantly to the comprehension and, specifically in the Christian sense, to their reconciliation. Moreover, they invoked overcoming nationalism and the discussion of actual changes in the world. The aim was to clarify how to bring to "all people work, bread, and justice".⁸¹ On the last day, a common service was arranged to which state authorities and the public were invited.⁸² Gustav Heinemann, one of the participants, German home secretary and chairman of the synod of the Protestant Church in Germany, denoted the congress of Speyer as "the first and promising al-

chiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, Archivstelle Boppard (hereafter: AEKiR-B), 72: 06-6/3-3.

80 Speyrer Erklärung, *Blätter für pfälzische Landesgeschichte und religiöse Volkskunde* 64 (1997), 281-282, here: 281.

81 Ibid.

82 Sturm to Stempel, 20 February 1950, ZAPf, Abt. 150, 47, Nr. 767.

liance between both our churches". There they also learnt to meet "as brothers of the common Lord Jesus Christ from now on".⁸³

"Concrete resolutions" were published alongside the declaration. A provisional commission of seven members per country should appoint a permanent *Bruderrat* (Council of Brothers)⁸⁴ to serve as a constant liaison committee of German and French Protestants and to embody "the organic entity of the church". The role of this transnational committee was an "approach to a necessary overcoming of national churchdom".⁸⁵ Until 1964 the Franco-German Council of Brothers met twice a year and discussed several subjects such as the German rearmament or the European question.⁸⁶ The significance of the Franco-German Council of Brothers was noted in a letter to the German members by Hans Stempel, the president of the *Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz* (Protestant Church of Palatinate) and after the death of Sturm in 1950 an important facilitator for the continuity of the institution:⁸⁷

"[...] the Council of Brothers was engaged to open a new relationship in a very difficult respect. [...] There remain souvenirs of theological discussions, of the common listening to the Word, of the community of prayer, and of the deep solidarity on the table of the Lord. This is all not only a souvenir. It is also something gained for us, something is provided for our entire next life. [...] Again and again it was attested

83 Ansprache Heinemann vor Nationalsynode der Reformierten Kirche Frankreichs in Nîmes, 4 June 1950, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (hereafter: AsD), Abt. 1, Mappe 123, Blatt 59/60.

84 Speyrer Erklärung, 281.

85 Yorck to Evangelisches Hilfswerk, 23 April 1950, ADW, ZB, 355.

86 Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche in Hessen und Nassau (hereafter: ZAEKHN), 62/1036b; Daniela Heimerl, *Der deutsch-französische Bruderrat. Annäherung – Verständigung – Versöhnung*, *KZG* 14, 2 (2001), 470-486, here: 482-483, 485.

87 Christophe Baginski, *Aus der Isolation zum Neubeginn. Die Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in: *Die Pfalz in der Nachkriegszeit. Wiederaufbau und demokratischer Neubeginn (1945-1954)*, ed. Gerhard Nestler and Hannes Ziegler (Kaiserslautern: Institut für Pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde, 2004), 243-261, here: 261.

quietly to us how the engagement of the Council of Brothers has assisted to reduce misunderstandings, to overcome alienation, to create real reconciliation.”⁸⁸

Through the Council of Brothers, they came to a new perception in Christ, to a “new retention from the conciliatory power that he gives to all”.⁸⁹ In fact, the Council of Brothers built an important element of connection and provided a transnational forum for discussions between French and German Protestants. It was a “new sort of working group”⁹⁰ notably also for non-church related topics. The break down in the 1960s did not diminish the success of the Council of Brothers.⁹¹ On the contrary, the institution that had emerged from the ecclesial domain created an essential basis for exchange and understanding between the French and Germans, especially in the phase in which “reconciliation” had not yet been obtained politically and within society. Community and solidarity in the faith could be exercised in the council and the unity of the church could be clarified across national borders.

In addition to this important element of connection, the participants of the Speyer meeting promoted the creation of a public discourse. The interest of the official church institutions should be awakened and the churches should be represented at the respective synods. The official and private exchange was to be facilitated and the ideas were to be publicized in the media. A student exchange program was already planned in May 1950 and an exchange of pastors was arranged in the summer of 1950. In the following years, there were a number of reciprocal invitations to synods and church conferences, to enthronements, and church dedications. Additional projects

88 Stempel to German members of the Council of Brothers, 9 February 1966, ZAEKHN, 62/0714.

89 Ibid.

90 Martin Greschat, *Das Hilfswerk der EKD und die Entstehung des deutsch-französischen Bruderrates*, in: *Soziale Arbeit in historischer Perspektive. Zum geschichtlichen Ort der Diakonie in Deutschland. Festschrift für Helmut Talazko zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jochen-Christoph Kaiser (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 135-188, here: 143.

91 The French side limited the necessity of the council to the period following the war. Later, the problems with the colonies and the challenges from an ecumenical world became more relevant.

were contemplated in Speyer, e.g. the journey of a French commission to study the German problems regarding refugees in the German Democratic Republic. This study trip was scheduled between August and September 1950. One Sunday of the year was to be devoted to international understanding and in the planning was the founding of a Franco-German boarding school. Raymond Schmittlein, the competent French chief executive of the Department of Cultural Affairs, soon gave his consent for this bi-national school. In the aftermath of the Speyer meeting, official church authorities and individual persons came together. Exchanges took place on various levels and their effects were felt beyond the directly church-based level. Parishes, believers, and the youth were all addressed.⁹²

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the Catholic and Protestant efforts at rapprochement between France and Germany will be briefly contrasted to explore the particularities of these approaches in civil society.

The analysis of the two meetings, the Bishop Meeting in Bühl and the Congress of Speyer, has revealed, firstly, that individuals had a certain significance in this processes. The chief military chaplains were the initiators of the meetings on both sides.⁹³ Robert Picard de la Vacquerie and Marcel Sturm were integrated in a broad network of church and policy formation. Both could count on the support of their church leadership and of General Koenig, who organizationally and individually had encouraged their efforts on rapprochement. In addition, they had socialized and communicated with numerous clergymen through their activities in Germany. This had been a starting point for the organization of the meetings. Thus, the two Frenchmen were in turn assisted by individuals on the German side.

Secondly, both meetings had in common that the French and Germans met on an equal level to work and to pray together. However, there were

92 Speyrer Erklärung; Protokoll der Sitzung des letzten deutsch-französischen Bruderrates, ADW, ZB, 355; Zouame-Bizeme, *Aspects*, 254-255; Yorck to Evangelisches Hilfswerk, 23 April 1950, ADW, ZB, 355.

93 It was also the personal commitment of Marcel Sturm at the meeting of Speyer that was stressed as the cause of its success.

differences when it came to the respective circle of participants. At the Catholic congress, it was only bishops that met. Primarily, their congress was about direct contacts and exchanges within the church itself. At the Protestant meeting, actors of the church on all levels as well as theologians and laymen were involved. The debaters came from all public domains, including the political sphere and community in general. Right from the beginning, the Protestant congress should have significance beyond church-internal affairs.

Thirdly, while on both sides encounters and discussions were important ways for the understanding between the French and Germans, there was a difference in questions and issues discussed at the respective meetings. The Catholic bishops came together to talk about church developments in both countries. Thus, they created trust through the meeting and the exchange and, in so doing, this trust formed a foundation for further steps. While political issues had thus been avoided at the Catholic gathering in Bühl, the Protestants in Speyer also discussed actual political questions. Concrete approaches on how to confront these questions were envisaged. With the publication of the program, it was hoped to reach the public and to produce a positive effect.

Fourthly, both sides regarded their religion as the basis of rapprochement. The Christian faith could act as a shared starting point and a connecting bond. The brotherly love and the specific idea of ‘reconciliation’ which both were deeply anchored in the Christian faith, enabled rapprochement and understanding, reconciliation and peace. For this it is important to clarify what ‘reconciliation’ for the Christian socialized participants of Bühl and Speyer meant. In the Christian sense, reconciliation is the re-constitution of the community with God that was destroyed by the sin and guilt of the human being. Reconciliation is the impact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in this it is deeply based on the faith. It caused the re-creation of the person before God.⁹⁴ Thus, reconciliation is primarily related to the relationship between God and mankind. It cannot be obtained by human acting but it is confirmed by the acting of God in Jesus for all times.

94 Dorothee Schlenke, Versöhnung / VI. Dogmatisch, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 8, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 1059-1061, here: 1059.

Reconciliation became true in faith and formed a new person. As reconciliation is central to the motivation, identity and objective of Christian action, there is at the same time a new relationship among humans. The human being is also responsible to his fellowmen. The individual has to assume guilt to create the condition for community.⁹⁵ 'Reconciliation' – such it is thought in Bühl and in Speyer – stood explicitly in this Christian context. For their international understanding, they adopted a theological concept that was different from the societal and political processes of rapprochement. Differences amongst them could not exist because they were eliminated by the reconciliation in the faith. Their community was created by the faith in the one Lord and by the entity of the church.

It is, fifthly, worth mentioning that questions of guilt and responsibility for the past were hardly discussed at both meetings. One can assume that this absence was related to the Christian understanding of reconciliation described above. Christian people at first and at last depend on the absolution of God and not of men, also if acceptance of guilt and forgiveness are necessary within human communities.⁹⁶ However, the Protestants discussed topics that were related to the past such as the question of the Saar, the division of Germany or issues of war criminals. Yet, they did not speak about guilt. One can assume that this was caused by the fact that the Germans who met in Speyer were members of the Confessing Church. Furthermore, there was the *Stuttgarter Erklärung* (Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt) in 1945 in which the Protestant church leadership confessed the German guilt and the joint responsibility of the church. This declaration caused the reopening of international relations for the German Protestants and was concretized in the *Darmstädter Wort* (Darmstadt Declaration) in 1947 by former circles of the Confessing Church.⁹⁷ Thus, the participants might have assumed that

95 Dorothee Schlenke, *Versöhnung / VII. Ethisch*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1061-1062; Lothar Ullrich, *Versöhnung*, in: *Lexikon der katholischen Dogmatik*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 536-540, here: 539.

96 Ibid.; Hans-Richard Reuter, *Versöhnung / IV. Ethisch*, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 35, ed. Gerhard Krause et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 40-43, here: 41.

97 *Wie Christen ihre Schuld bekennen. Die Stuttgarter Erklärung 1945*, ed. Gerhard Besier and Gerhard Sauter (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985);

the German Protestants had already dealt with their past. On the Catholic side there was the *Fuldaer Hirtenbrief* (1945 Fulda Pastoral Letter) in 1945 in which the German bishops noted the responsibility of Catholics during the Third Reich. However, in accordance with the Pope they denied a responsibility of the German people as a whole.⁹⁸ Primarily they did not speak about the war and the Nazi period in Bühl because it was a meeting only concerning ecclesiastical matters in which political issues were avoided.

Finally, coming back to the question of success and impact of these two conferences, it is reasonable to assume that both the Bishop Meeting in Bühl and the Congress of Speyer had been successful. Both sides imposed on their churches the obligation to promote the rapprochement of people and peace in the world. Such encounters as in Bühl and in Speyer had been important milestones in furthering the rapprochement. It is therefore not surprising that the meetings also had broad effects such as the Franco-German exchange projects or the outstanding Council of Brothers. For the significance of the efforts on the Protestant and Catholic side it must also be emphasized that the meetings took place at a time at which the society still had objections to such attempts. In the ecclesial domain, rapprochement between the peoples had begun quite early, even before political efforts had been resumed. Nevertheless, the consent of the French authorities to the meetings already signaled the change of French policy towards Germany.⁹⁹

The meetings of Bühl and Speyer are two prime examples of individuals and societal groups to bring about rapprochement immediately after World War II. The eclectic efforts of both chief military chaplains explain

Martin Greschat, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung. Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in: *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Victor Conzemius et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 115-177; Karl Herbert, *Kirche zwischen Aufbruch und Tradition. Entscheidungsjahre nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1989), 61-106.

98 Konrad Repgen, *Die Erfahrungen des Dritten Reiches und das Selbstverständnis der deutschen Katholiken nach 1945*, in: *Die Zeit nach 1945*, 127-179; Vera Bücker, *Die Schuld Diskussion im deutschen Katholizismus nach 1945* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1989).

99 Fritsch-Bournazel, *Wende in der französischen Nachkriegspolitik*.

the special and successful approach of the reconciliation through civil society. Individuals from the Catholic and Protestant church have contributed simultaneously and at a very early stage to the rapprochement of France and Germany not only in the ecclesial domain but also in a broader public. They realized independent from each other, in a similar manner, but incorporating different approaches, the reconciliation on a religious and Christian basis. The entity of the church and the Christian idea of reconciliation served as starting points, triggering further initiatives of rapprochement. Thus, after the end of the Second World War, civil society – and therein religious people – had already started to work toward Franco-German rapprochement thereby creating an essential basis for the later incipient political rapprochement of both countries.

