The Religious Mind of Lefevre D'Estaples (1455-1536)

Rita Charlotte Kucera
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1084

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1955 Rita Charlotte Kucera
THE RELIGIOUS MIND OF
LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES
(1485-1556)

by
Rita Charlotte Nucera

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June
1955
LIFE

Rita Charlotte Kucera was born in Berwyn, Illinois, on November 4, 1931.

She was graduated from Our Lady of Holy Mount elementary school, Cicero, in June, 1945, and from Nazareth Academy, La Grange, in June, 1949. She received her Bachelor of Arts Honors degree from Mundelein College in June, 1953.

From September, 1953, when she began her graduate studies, the author served as a graduate assistant in the Department of History at Loyola University.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION ...............................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


II. LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES: EARLY INFLUENCES AND HUMANISM .......... | 18 |

Facts of his early life—His temperament—His studies, teachers, and acquaintances at the University of Paris—His travels in Italy; contact with schools of philosophic thought and some of their leading figures—Teacher at the college of Cardinal Lemoine in Paris—Restorer of the texts of ancient philosophy—His aids—His defense of humanism and its critical methods: the Rouchlin affair—Early contacts with Erasmus.

III. LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES: DEVELOPING RELIGIOUS INTERESTS .......... | 41 |

Life of Lefèvre at the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés—His application of critical techniques to religious works—His patristic studies—The Christian Neoplatonic influences: publication of the Pseudo-Dionysius—Lefèvre's increasing interest in mysticism: publication of Ramon Lull, the Victorines, Nicholas of Cusa—His Quincuplex Psalterium, 1509—His love of the monastic life—His voyage in the Rhine region: contact with the Brethren of the Common Life and the tradition of medieval mysticism—His editions of mystical works—His anti-Muslim writings—His Epistole duvat Pauli apostoli, 1512—Luther's opinion of Lefèvre.

IV. LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES AND THE "GROUP OF MEAUX" ............... | 78 |

Conditions in the diocese of Meaux—Plans of Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet for ecclesiastical reform—the Meaux circle—Lefèvre, Gérard Roussel, Michel d'Arande, Pierre Caroli, Martial Mazarier, François Vatable, Guillaume Farel—The mystical correspondence of Briçonnet and Marguerite d'Angoulême—Lefèvre's Commentarii initiatorii in quatuor evangelia—His mystical
doctrines--His French translations of the Bible--Relations of Lefèvre and the Meaux circle with the radical Swiss and German reformers.


Noël Bédier and the Sorbonne--His position toward Lefèvre--The "three Magdalen" controversy--Examination of Lefèvre's 1512 Commentaries--Attackers and defenders of Lefèvre--Interest of Marguerite in evangelism--Changing position of Francis I and Louise of Savoy toward Lefèvre and the "group"--Inquisitorial commission at Meaux--Flight of the reformers--Lefèvre, Roussel, Arandé, and Caroli at Strasbourg--Continuing condemnations of Lefèvre--His visit to Erasmus at Basel--Lefèvre and Roussel at Blois--Lefèvre at Nérac--Interest of the papal nuncio in Lefèvre--His French Bible--Visit of Calvin--Last moments and death of Lefèvre.

VI. CONCLUSION

An analytical summary of the religious ideas of Lefèvre d'Étaples and his position in sixteenth-century reform.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A study of the religio-intellectual state of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples to some degree touches upon what has proven to be one of the most basic yet controversial of historical problems—the interrelationship between the Renaissance and the Reformation. The connection between the two movements was especially close in France. In both the same man occupied "an almost identical position, standing on a threshold which he never actually crossed."¹ Lefèvre was a humanist and a religious reformer, exposed to the major currents of thought in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and acquainted with a majority of the key humanists and religious thinkers in the course of his lifetime. Undoubtedly, he was influenced by these intellectual and personal contacts in some way. Because his own views, in both their developing form and as they existed at the time of his death, have not been conclusively agreed upon to the satisfaction of both Catholic and Protestant authors, much uncertainty remains regarding Lefèvre's religio-intellectual state and, therefore, his sympathies in the religious reform movement. The perusal of

major Reformation historians for their estimate of Lefèvre's rôle in the
conflicts of the period proves that there is a need and a reason for a
reinterpretation of the man and his work. Other secondary writers who do
little more than mention him in general works do not agree on the precise
position he occupied in the religious struggle. 2

2 Among certain Protestant writers especially, the question has
been much discussed of whether Lefèvre was a "French Luther" whose ideas
developed independently of those of the German reformer or whether the type
of religious reform commenced by Lefèvre reflected German ideas. This borders
upon another large yet traditionally posed question which involves the native
or foreign influences of the origins of French reform. Those Protestants
who hold that it began with John Calvin and who consider Lefèvre's work as
that of a pre-reformer are not too much concerned with this question. Like-
wise, those writers who see in Lefèvre's ideas only those of orthodox Cathol-
icism have no need of studying the originality of his views, since they rather
link them with the reformist ideas of the preceding centuries. G. de Félice
very simply holds that Lefèvre's announcement in 1512 of justification by
faith and of the approaching revival and improvement of the religion of
nations indicates that ideas of reformation showed themselves simultaneously
in different places without the possibility of communications having taken
place between those who set themselves at the head of the movement. His view
is that, when a religious or political revolution is ripe, it makes its
appearance on every side, and none can say who first began it. History of the
Protestants of France, trans. from the French, London, 1855, I, 2-3. The
traditional position is that Lefèvre was a precursor of the actual French
Reformation. Protestants hold this view on the basis that Lefèvre was a
humanist who separated from the reform movement as it became more dogmatic
with Calvin through his weakness and fear of separating outwardly from a
Church whose corruptions he well recognized, e.g., Henry M. Baird, History
of the Rise of the Huguenots of France, New York, 1879, 1, 97; cf. Henri
Hauser, "De l'humanisme et de la réforme en France, 1512-1552," Revue
historique, LXIV, 1897, 283. Of the failure of Lefèvre and the "group of
Méaux" to effect a reform within the Church, Myron P. Gilmore says: "Their
tragedy was part of the larger tragedy of the whole movement of Christian
humanism," The World of Humanism, 1455-1517, The Rise of Modern Europe,
New York, 1932, 219. C. Schmidt takes Lefèvre and some of his confreres to
task for not overtly breaking with the venerated Church while they took
refuge in speculative mysticism, excusing themselves insofar as they con-
sidered external unity non-essential and spiritual unity more important, "Le
mysticisme quéotiste en France au début de la réformation sous François ler,
To one who fails to find in Lefèvre the point where specific aspects

Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français, VI, 1858, 450-453; cf. Abel Lefranc, who tries to show that Marguerite, who became the protectress of Lefèvre and his group, considered external worship unimportant and so maintained silence on them while she was content to meditate on the sufferings of her Savior, "Les idées religieuses de Marguerite de Navarre," ibid., XLVII, 1898, 115-136. Catholic writers who consider Lefèvre a precursor of the reform mean by this radical reform. Though he was sincere in advocating reform within the Church, they explain, he inaugurated a movement seized upon by others with more radical views which he could then no longer control, e.g., É. Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, Paris, 1926, IX, 1, 131, 156. That his views were not incompatible with orthodox Catholicism is held in George V. Jourdan, The Movement towards Catholic Reform in the Early XVI Century, London, 1914, 89; F. Imbert de la Tour, Les origines de la réforme, Paris, 1906-1914, III, 152-153; François Hermans, Histoire doctrinale de l'humanisme chrétien, Tournai, 1948, I, 160-201. Lucien Febvre tenders his support to the latest predominating consensus of opinion regarding the origins of French reform of a radical nature. In large measure independent of Luther, the French themselves gave impetus to the reform movement, but it seems illegitimate to link the scholarly Lefèvre with it, since he never attached a primary importance to the abuses of which the reform spirit was born, "Les origines de la réforme française et le problème général des causes de la réforme," Revue historique, CLXI, 1929, 25-26. Henry S. Lucas, while holding to the connection between Christian humanism and reform, interprets Lefèvre as one who desired a moderate reform in the Church by a purification of religious practices and as an opponent of scholasticism which dominated theological and other studies, but says he never even drew near the Lutheran position, The Renaissance and the Reformation, New York, 1934, 582-603. Another group maintains that Lefèvre was a reformer who acted independently of any other. O. Douen admits that Lefèvre was milder than Luther, "La réforme française: est-elle la fille de la réforme allemande?", BSHPF, XLI, 1892, 90-91. J. Michelet maintains Lefèvre's independence of Luther and contends that he was the first French Protestant, "un humble Luther," Histoire de France, nouv. éd., Paris, 1874, VIII, 121, E. Doumergue considers Lefèvre the originator of Fabriano Protestantism, different from the Protestantism inaugurated by Calvin, and goes to great lengths to prove that he was a reformer independent of Luther's influence, Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps, Lausanne, 1899, I, 85-86, and app. V, 543-545. Doumergue calls the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where Lefèvre lived, "le berceau du protestantisme français." Here in 1512 he wrote his Pauline Commentaries, "le premier livre protestant," "Paris protestant au XVIe siècle, 1509-1572," BSHPF, XLV, 1896, 13-14. Charles Drion dates the first period of French Protestantism from 1455, the birthdate of Lefèvre, to 1598, the Edict of Nantes, Histoire chronologique
of the Renaissance and the religious reform meet—the key which seems to

attests that Lefèvre taught "Protestant" doctrines independently of Luther
in 1512 but intimates that he was not a Protestant in the technical sense of
the term simply because no Protestant party per se existed at that time,
"Jacobus Faber Stapulensis. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Reformation in
Frankreich," Zeitschrift für die Historische Theologie, XXII, 1852, 32-33.
N. Weiss, somewhat more moderate in his classification of Lefèvre and the
early reform movement, links the ideas of humanism and reform. He states that
Paris and the reform are almost mutually exclusive terms, since Paris was
connected with two names inseparable from French reformist activity—Lefèvre
and his compatriot, the Hebrew scholar, François Vatable—and with such an
important event as the French translation of the New Testament, "Paris et la
réforme sous François Ier," BSHPF, XLIII, 1894, 242-270. Jean Barnaud
perceives the seeds of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith
already present in Lefèvre's 1509 Psalter, Études d'histoire religieuse,
/N.p., n.d./, 210. Louis Reynaud, in his two works, enunciates a position
which appears somewhat contradictory. He holds that the theory of sixteenth-
century reform was formulated in France by Lefèvre, who perhaps taught
Lutheranism to Luther himself, and that thus Lutheranism's primitive foyer
was not Wittenberg but rather Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Histoire générale de
argues that, though Lefèvre probably did influence Luther, he was a humanist
who denounced abuses but who wished a prudent reform within the Church and
never accepted the idea of a schism, Francais et Allemands: histoire de
leurs relations intellectuelles et sentimentales, Paris, 1850, 82-84. His
idea is that Luther separated from his too conservative initiator, Lefèvre,
and intensified the pace of the reform, Histoire générale, 173, n. 2. Thus
the reform was the most perfect expression of a Germany liberated at the end
of the Middle Ages, ibid., 171, and it was essentially the reaction of the
German spirit in the religious domain, Francais et Allemands, 72. Actual
French reform occurred as a result of the influence of Lutheran ideas, ibid.,
82-84. All Reynaud's observations indicate that he considers Lefèvre one
who prepared the way for reform but who failed to accomplish it because he
was too mild. Samuel Berger maintains another equally complex view. Pro-
estantism took root in France through the influence of Luther's writings,
spread especially by the "bibliens" (called "luthériens" by many persons) of
Meaux and Paris even prior to 1525, and by the influence of Erasmus with his
critical spirit and his insistence on the need for reform. But it is not
necessary to believe that the first French Protestants were the true disciples
of Luther, he points out, for the doctors were Erasmians and the people by
instinct Zwinglian and iconoclast, "L'Église luthérienne et la France,"
Revue chrétienne, V, 1897, 162. Berger insists that the Meaux group were
disciples of Luther certainly in one thing: they were "bibliens" with all
resolve at least some of the more patent and most basic difficulties and

their hearts, "Le procès de Guillaume Briçonnet au Parlement de Paris en
1525," BSHPF, XLIV, 1895, 22. In the latter article, the influence of
Erasmus is not mentioned while the evangelical of Luther is stressed. Still
another school would hold that there was no French reform either independent
of or prior to Luther and that he even influenced Lefèvre, e.g., A. L.
Herminjard, ed., Correspondance des reformateurs dans les pays de langue
française, Genève et Paris, 1866-1870, I, 239; cf. John Vienot, "Ya-t-il
une réforme française antérieure à Luther?," BSHPF, LXII, 1913, 108. Vienot
advances an interpretation of the Meaux reform especially unique for a
president of the Society for the History of French Protestantism: he draws
together all the events at Meaux under the title "La réforme catholique à
Meaux" and the general classification of "La préréforme," admitting that
Lefèvre preserved in his works the fundamental doctrines of his Church, and
that he, like Erasmus, served as a precursor of the reform by calling for a
return to the Scriptures, Histoire de la réforme française, Paris, 1926, I,
47-49. An extreme position is taken by Margaret Mann, who traces Lefèvre's
development from his period as a "biblien" to what she considers his convinced
Lutheranism; she holds that in 1523 Lefèvre wished to keep at the same
time the exegetical methods of Erasmus and the theology of Luther, but that little
by little he became preoccupied with the system of the German reformer,
Erasme et les débuts de la réforme française (1617-1656), Paris, 1934, 67-73.
Without substantial proof, W. G. Moore goes so far as to label Lefèvre "le
grand interprète de Luther en France" on the basis of his supposed transla-
tions of Lutheran writings, La réforme allemande et la littérature française;
Recherches sur la notoriété de Luther en France, Strasbourg, 1930, 310. He
admits that, though Lefèvre familiarised himself with Lutheran thought, it
would seem temerarious to deny that he kept his own independence, ibid.,
176-177. Typical of the equation of Fabriesian views with heretical Lutheran
views is the opinion of one of Lefèvre's Catholic contemporaries and a
councillor of the king in the Parlement of Bordeaux, the historian, Florimond
de Rammont: Lefèvre was one of the "Luthero-Zwingliens" at Meaux who intro-
duced Lutheranism into this diocese but maintained the outward appearances of
Catholicism for the sake of making easy entrance, L'Histoire de la naissance,
progrès, et décadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle, Cambrai, 1611, II, 1254.
M. Crevier, the Gallican historian of the University of Paris, confuses
Lutheranism and the aim of the Meaux group by characterising its members,
including Lefèvre, as "tous ou Luthériens décidés, ou du moins très douteux
Catholiques," Histoire de l'Université de Paris, depuis son origine jusqu'en
which seems to show the continuity of his thought—he is apt to appear a
bundle of inconsistencies and possibly even one of the most enigmatic figures
in the intellectual and religious history of Renaissance France. To at least
a degree, this magic key to the understanding of Lefèvre's religious ideas
is his Christian humanism. Few authors, if any, would seriously dispute the
fact that he was a Christian humanist, but far too many—those eager to place
him in the camp of the first avowedly Protestant leaders—would label his
first stage of thought "Christian humanism" yet argue his second ideological
period as that of preoccupation with religious reform.

This position results from a double confusion. The first is the
tendency to make the term "religious reform" synonymous with the radical
religious reform which means the overt separation from the Catholic fold and
all its practices. The consequent illogical conclusion is that Lefèvre
simply prepared the way for reform because he failed through fear to leave the
Church openly. More accurately, he did help to pave the way for radical
religious reform even though he did not intend to effect a rupture with Rome.
The orthodox Catholic would argue that there was both a possibility of
religious reform within the fold of the Church and an actual desire for it
on the part of many sincere persons. One reform movement in the Church can
be dated from the days of Cluny, while others manifested themselves, for
example, in the mystical systems of the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries,
and until the Protestant cleavage itself.

A second and more basic error is the tendency to confuse the
general term "reform" with religious reform only, though it might be applied
with equal precision to both philosophical and educational reform. It cannot be too much stressed that philosophical and religious reform were intimately connected. The very close relationship between a reform of studies and the spiritualisation of sixteenth-century religious life made inevitable the fact that men like Lefèvre (even completely excluding his religious work per se), with Vatable and Budé in France and Erasmus and Reuchlin in the Germanies, by the very fact that they were savants and philologists, became powerful aids of what finally came to be termed a "religion revolution." It was mainly by their critical work that these humanists rendered easier the religious

---

3 Three Protestant authors pointedly state that the reformatory movement in France had its roots in the University of Paris, a conclusion reached by them in large part through a study of Lefèvre d'Estaples as an outstanding teacher and a scholarly renovator of the original texts of Greek philosophy, and of the reactionary attitudes of many doctors of the Sorbonne. Theodore of Besa, a most determined opponent of the "superstition" of the Roman Church, equates religious with educational and literary reform when he says it was God Who first excited Reuchlin with his knowledge of Hebrew, and that with Lefèvre the true studies of the arts began to flower amidst the horrible barbarity and sophistry of the University of Paris, *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France*, ed. nouv. avec comm. par G. Baum et E. Cunis, Paris, 1885, I, 2-5. He holds that it was Lefèvre who single-handedly chased this barbarity out of the University, Les vrais portraits des hommes illustres, 153, cited in Doumercus, *Jean Calvin*, I, 75-80; cf. also Baird, *Rise of the Huguenots*, I, 67. A. Douarche says that Lefèvre, before belonging to the religious reform, had taught "avec éclat" at the University of Paris, *L'Université de Paris et les Jesuites (XVIe et XVIIe siècles)*, Paris, 1886, 24. Perhaps one of the best accounts of the educational reform connected with Christian humanism, with stress on the outmoded teaching methods at Paris and the Sorbonne, is found in the opening pages of François de Dainville, S.J., *La naissance de l'humanisme moderne*, Les Jesuites et l'éducation de la société française, t. I, Paris, 1940.
revolution which was about to begin. The fact that Lefèvre as a Christian humanist was a reformer in a very wide sense should always be borne in mind. Yet his thought was not free from elements apparently foreign. Everything in it does not conform to one basic pattern.

One author, in discussing Christian humanism or "Erasmian humanism" as he terms it, says it was above all "an intellectual revolution with religious overtones." A fitting characterisation indeed, for the Christian humanists were those scholars who followed Erasmus in a program for the reform of religion, letters, and education. The central conception of their program was the necessity of returning to the original sources of pure Christianity and classical culture. But the originals could be read and studied only if the worker were thoroughly familiar with the ancient tongues and proficient in critical philological methods.

When Catholics would accept what they found in early Christian writings rather than that witnessed in contemporary ecclesiastical practices and in the dry theology of the Schoolmen, they would be practicing simple, ideal, and authentic Christianity, the true "Philosophia Christi." All the objectives of the Christian humanists of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries simply point up the fact that, from its very origin, there were two

---

5 Ibid., 41.
6 Ibid.
currents in Christianity—first, an interior religion, aiming at union with God through the mediation of Christ, and, second, a public and exterior discipline in the form of a visible Church with definite rules and practices to be followed. Ideally, these two facets of truly Catholic life developed simultaneously and proportionately until it became evident toward the "waning of the Middle Ages" that the heretofore well-maintained equilibrium was beginning to go: by and large, the interior religious life of the Church was being overshadowed by its exterior disciplinary aspects, and its soul was losing to intellectualism.

To the bona fide Christian humanist, it was evident that the dogmas, rites, practices, and particular devotions of the exterior cult stemmed either directly or indirectly from divine institution. However, abuses had crept in. He fully realised it was his task to restore in the minds of his fellow-men the idea that what gave meaning to their religious life was the striving after an intimate, living union with Christ their Redeemer. Imbert de la Tour insists that Christian humanism did not attempt to change either dogma or worship but rather to renovate interior religious life, to make religion be, as these humanists themselves said, "non pas tant un système qu'une vie." 7

---

7 Origines, II, 398-399. This view is upheld by Albert Autin, who adds that early French reform was linked quite closely with humanism, originally developing within a circle of savants in the shelter of royal power. In this first stage, it manifested a manner of fervor more than a schismatic tendency or the characteristics of a political party, its second and third stages respectively, L'Écho de la réforme en France au XVIe siècle, thèse présentée à la faculté des lettres de Montpellier, Toulon, 1917, 19. William Rubbi likewise indicates how the king's interest in questions of religious reform was motivated primarily by the labors of the savants in his entourage, François Ier et le mouvement intellectuel en France (1515-1547), Lausanne,
They wanted theology to be not a syllogistic extension of dogma, but rather

1913. As the title implies, the intimate connection between humanism and reform is stressed in Augustin Renaudet, Préformateurs et humanistes à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494-1517), 3e éd., Paris, 1955. Ferdinand Buisson optimistically upholds the thesis that humanism did not wait for Luther to extend to the religious domain the spirit of renovation which would transform the world; as humanity had returned to the Iliad, it was also going to return to the Gospel, "Note additionnelle sur la réforme française; les apôtres de la tolérance," Revue de métaphysique et de morale, IX, 1918, 706. He holds that there was a rejuvenation in sacred letters and in profane letters at the same time, and that the humanists were penetrated with evangelic ideas and in their writings spoke of religion with simplicity and liberty. For the most part, the humanists had little inclination for Luther and actually feared the trouble he caused. The only thing they had in common with him was a desire for Church reform. Fervent disciples of the Renaissance, they were neither revolutionaries nor innovators but pious restorers who were of the same reformist part as the popes, bishops, and councils; they fancied themselves "avec l'Église et au sein de l'Église," Sebastien Castellion, son vie et son œuvre (1515-1563), Paris, 1891, 50-54. Even Lavisse and Hambour agree that early sixteenth-century reform did not mean schism but rather "réformer l'Église dans son chef et dans ses membres," Histoire générale du IV e siècle à nos jours, Paris, 1894, IV, 475-500. Hauser sees the link between Renaissance and reform in the search of both for a simpler and a more rational dogma, shorn of unessential intermediaries, mysteries, and ceremonies, and in the desire for a return to the Bible. The humanists supplied the reformers with a weapon for this task, philological criticism; Hauser describes it as the "arsenal ou les reformateurs piuseront leurs armes les plus terribles, contre la vieille Église." Like Buisson, he holds that humanism prepared the way for a religious revolution by substituting the spirit of free examination for respect for authority. He also contends that the reformation movement could only aid the triumph of humanism, since he says the reform demanded that each Christian himself reflect on the mysteries of religion and so imposed on him the cultivation of his intelligence; it rejected the sterile scholasticism of the universities to replace it by a freer method, founded on an individual interpretation of Scripture, "De l'humanisme et de la réforme," Rev. hist., LXIV, 265-267. These two movements, however, could remain together only so long as the reform in France was nothing more than an undefined tendency toward evangelism and the practical purification of the Church. When by the 1540's Protestantism became dogmatic, there was a basic cleavage between humanism and the reformation, ibid., 285-295. P. Jouarda seems to come to the same conclusion in an article in which he attempts to distinguish the French humanism of the sixteenth-century from medieval humanism. The main characteristic of the former which he notes is its rediscovery of antiquity under all its forms, "L'Humanisme français au XVI e siècle," Quelques aspects de l'humanisme médieval (conferences données dans le
a study of an abiding by the principles expressed in the Word of God.

Christian humanism rendered several services to religious reform. By emphasizing the need for a return to the Bible and the Fathers, it gave birth to a religious thought which supplanted a way of religious life that was in many instances too rigid and less interior, and it united this thought with classical culture. Its main unfortunate effect, though indirect, sprang from the use made of the humanists' critical and philological methods. This helped to smooth the way for what was the oncoming cleavage in Western Christendom. Though there was a profound affinity between Renaissance and reform, the two movements in France actually could not maintain a close union beyond the point where religious reform meant merely a vague "return to the Bible" and some kind of practical reform within the Church. Christian humanists as a whole sought the renewal of the fabric of religion within the Church; basically they left dogma and cult unchanged. They did not adhere to the radical side of the religious reform. There was a gulf between Christian humanism and the Protestant Revolt. The first submitted to ecclesiastical authority; the latter separated from the traditional fold.

grand amphithéâtre de la Faculté des lettres de Montpellier, mars-avril, 1943), Association Guillaume Budé, section de Montpellier, Paris, 1943, 51. Jourda considers the cult of the truth as the most complex consequence of the rediscovery of antiquity, each humanist striving for what he believes to be the truth. At this point, humanists, each one believing he has found it, break with each other, and humanism divides itself. While Erasmus and Lefèvre d'Étaples enumerate only the most prudent hypotheses, Calvin breaks with all tradition. So close does Jourda consider the relations between humanism and reform that he argues that the tragic side of humanism was that out of this devotion to truth came the break in European unity in the religious wars, ibid., 57-58.
One further note of explanation may be in order here. The age just prior to the Protestant break with the Church was an age of somewhat fluid theology. This is not to say that the doctrines of Catholicism were undergoing evolution, but simply that in many instances they had not been defined with complete precision and that many points had been taken for granted until they were challenged by the radical group. This observation, together with the fact that Lefèvre as a religious reformer was preoccupied with the mystical element in religion and not with doctrinal questions, may in large measure exonerate him from any charges of formal or even material heresy.

At the basis of much humanist distress and of the coldness of much religious life was the inadequate character of fifteenth and early sixteenth century scholasticism, on the downhill slowly but certainly since the fourteenth century. Philosophy, theology, and education all suffered as a result. The humanistic side of the classics actually was not part of the curriculum of the University of Paris, and Greek was unknown to the students. All studies were to be undertaken for the study of a reasoned theology, invaded oftentimes by vain questions and syllogisms. What alarmed the Christian humanists in France was that they could not even get the masters of the arts faculty or the doctors of the Sorbonne to realize the necessity of rejuvenating scholasticism. The latter felt that they spoke with the authority of the centuries.\(^8\)

---

8 Dainville, Naissance, 6-7; cf. also Imbert de la Tour, Origines, II, 554, 561, and Ricardo G. Villoslada, S.J., La Universidad de Paris durante los estudios de Francisco de Vitoria, O.P., (1507-1622), Hommae, 1938, 79-82, 135-116.
pressure of nominalism, philosophy continued to degenerate in the fifteenth century into quarrels over picayune points of logic, and it presented no solid metaphysical system to be used as a rationalistic complement to the faith. Many students spurned philosophy completely, and, abandoning good reason, they based their religious truth solely upon faith and the Scriptures. This does not mean that they spurned the visible Church, but rather that they felt its true nourishment could be better achieved by a closer alignment with biblical doctrines.

In this regard, fideism was in direct relationship with evangelism, or the simple turning of more attention to the content and precepts of the Scripture as handed down from ecclesiastical antiquity. The evangelism of the humanists must not be confused with radical evangelism, the placing of full and entire confidence in Scripture to the exclusion of the authority of the visible Church. Christian humanists and evangelists, thus reacting against the intellectualism of the preceding and the present centuries, wanted a living religious system. Weary of the quarrels of words and the ratioincations of the School, they wished for a theology more aware of the Gospel and the Fathers. Earlier, John Gerson had lamented the mixture of the provinces of theology and philosophy and the fact that one considered himself a theologian solely because he had learned philosophy while he neglected the Bible and the Fathers. Gilson points out that the criticisms of scholastic theology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries say nothing against it that Gerson had not already said. But it was the growth and the spread of humanism that made inevitable

9 History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, N.Y., 1955, 532
a conflict between its upholders and the scholastics.10

A second source from which sixteenth century fideism sprang extended back to the thirteenth century through the Italian Renaissance, though its ramifications were very definitely felt in that of the French. A blind faith had been a natural result of the Averroist doctrine of the two truths, that what was true in philosophy was not necessarily true in theology and vice-versa. For some time in Italy, this impersonal, collectivistic, scientific, and naturalistic interpretation of Aristotle had held a prominent place in the Italian universities. The philosophers of the Italian Renaissance were of two major groups, Aristotelians and Platonists. The non-Averroist Aristotelians attempted to introduce more personal and humanistic values into Aristotle whose fundamentally scientific bent had been intensified by the Commentator and his followers. The Platonists, actually Neoplatonists, fled to the idealistic philosophy of Plato and the Alexandrians11 since it provided imaginative values for a religious revival in opposition to the fundamentally rationalistic interests of Aristotle. Under the Italian Neoplatonists, Platonism became

10 Dainville, Naissance, 8.

11 Alexandrianism, under the leadership of Plotinus in the third century A.D., was the first stage of Neoplatonism. The Alexandrians accepted the major theories of Plato and intensified the mystical elements in his explanation of the relationship of the world to the One. Plotinus and his successors, Iamblichus in the fourth century and Proclus in the fifth, described the emanation of creation from its Cause and its return to It.
somewhat eclectic and universal, embracing a love of perfection wherever it could be discerned and identifying this with the essence of the Christian faith. Sheering Alexandrian Neoplatonism of its oriental values and aligning it more closely, though eclectically, with contemporary Christianity, they made Plato's One the single Truth—Platonic in philosophy, Christian in theology, and humanistic in values. Italian humanists, in seeking a renovation of Platonic thought, sought at the same time what they felt was a purer and a deeper religious life. "A turning away from scientific questions to the problems of the moral life and the religious imagination" is the common note in the Neoplatonism of the Florentine Academy and in the "Philosophia Christi" of Erasmus and Lefèvre.

Thus, it is evident that the religio-intellectual history of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries manifested an intimate connection between divergent shades of humanism and various types of reform. With all these currents of thought, Lefèvre d'Etaples in some way came into contact, and everything with which a person comes into contact has some influence on his mental views and his religious mind. Lefèvre was no exception. His views

12 Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, Chicago, 1948, 6-7.


14 Cassirer, Renaissance Philosophy, 6.
were formulated through the interaction of mystical elements in his own character and his response to the influences of his environment upon him.

This study is intended to be neither a biographical sketch of the known facts of Lefèvre's life nor a chronological outline of its events. Chronology and facts will be important only in so far as they are relevant in showing the progression of Fabrisian ideas. One aim of this thesis is to follow this progressive evolution of Lefèvre's thought and to discover possible relations between his most vital ideas, between, for example, his humanism and his views on reform. Stress throughout will be laid not only on the trends of thought with which he became acquainted through both study and personal contacts but also on the states of mind of those with whom he became associated and who helped to form Lefèvre's own views. Also we have endeavored to discover his precise rôle in French religious reform from his own statements and actions. This study of the persons, places, and things which acted upon him extends from the earliest period of his life until his death, with particular emphasis on the milieux in which he lived and moved during the truly crucial years of his life. By this method we have attempted to get the "feel" of his mental state.

In great part, the study has been based on extensive use of the correspondence of religious reformers, Lefèvre's biblical commentaries, registers of the Sorbonne, and contemporary plays, journals, and histories. The letters of Lefèvre and members of his circle prove themselves completely invaluable for information on their relations with Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Capiton, and their co-workers. Actually, this is very important, for it is
in terms of these contacts that Lefèvre is often classified as a Protestant. The second basis for holding his break with Catholicism rests on certain statements in his Commentaries of 1512 and 1522; the third consists in the confusion of Lefèvre's acts and those of the Meaux group under Bishop Guillaume Briconnet with the more radical acts of the confirmed Lutherans, at a period when Lutheranism was simultaneously infiltrating Meaux, Paris, and other sections of the French realm.

There has been less Catholic interest in Lefèvre than Protestant. In general, interest in him since 1900 has been practically nil, especially in the United States. Yet the importance of a study of the religious mind of Lefèvre d'Étaples cannot be doubted, for one who has in some measure grasped his thought has capsuled in a microcosm some of the major currents of ideas in the Renaissance and the pre-reform period and their intimate correlation.
CHAPTER II

LEFÈVRE D'ÉTAPLES: EARLY INFLUENCES AND HUMANISM

Precise facts are lacking regarding the date of Lefèvre's birth, his family, his infancy, and his boyhood studies. He was born at Étaples in Picardy about 1455,¹ when that district was in the hands of the Duke of Burgundy. Certain authors pretend to find it significant in the formation of his mental attitudes that Lefèvre was a Picard and, more especially, an Étaplois. Lefranco considers the common traits of famous Picards to be sanguinity of temperament, preoccupation with a struggle for liberty, and the possession of a strong desire for discussion, yet he holds that in these persons enthusiastic ardor and apparent rigidity are not incompatible; they want to make triumph the causes they believe just.² Barnaud states that these traits apply to Lefèvre only in a very mild form,³ and it is most apparent that sanguinity was rather the opposite of Lefèvre's temperament. Through his contacts with the foreigners and merchants who frequented the small seaport town in northwestern France where he was born and spent the days of his early youth, his

¹ J. A. Fabricius, one of Lefèvre's older biographers, states that he was born before 1440, but bases this on a literal interpretation of a line in Salmon Macrin's ode on his death in 1536, "Aevi peracto jam prope asculo," "Faber Stapulensis," Bibliotheca Latina, Medias et Infimae Aestatis, Hamburghi, VI, 1734, 418-419.


³ Études, 5-6.
independence of judgment and originality of thought must have developed, while
his faculty of curiosity was stimulated by the appearance of so much that was
unfamiliar to him.4 Jourdan stresses it is to these early surroundings that
we must attribute above all "that deeply rooted conception of the Catholicity
of the Christian Church which afterwards coloured his teaching so distinctively-
ly," and that, when he left Staples, he carried with him the profound and con-
servative sense of religion still a noted trait of the inhabitants of Staples.5

Lefèvre's family, of modest yet comfortable circumstances,6 sent him
to study at the University of Paris because he displayed a definite capacity
for learning. A diligent student there and wholly intent on the work at hand,
he soon renounced the entire income of his small patrimony in favor of his
relatives.7 Of impeccable morals and, though by nature contemplative, mild,
timid, and serene,8 nonetheless he loved to be gay, to sing, and to have dis-
cussions with his friends, often finding much material for raillery in their
stupidity.9 It must have been a combination of his vivacious intellect and
the normal youthful ardor for polemic that led him to poke a kindly humor at
the doings of his fellow-students. While he gave evidence of a marked optimism

4 Jourdan, Catholic Reform, 80.
5 Ibid.
6 Graf, "Faber Stapulensis," ZHT, XXII, 6, n.
7 Scaevola de Saint-Marthe, Elogia doctorum in Gallia virorum, Jena,
8 Barnaud, Études, 7.
9 Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 24, n. 3.
of character, he never did like crowds or too many personal friendships.\(^{10}\)

One day in later years, he remarked that he did not even like to write and was so little habituated to it that already he could foresee his place on the list of obscure men\(^{11}\).

At Paris, Lefèvre studied a variety of subjects, including music under Jean Labin and Jacques Turbelin,\(^{12}\) but most significant in view of his future work were his lessons under the classical masters, Jean Lascaris\(^ {13}\) and George Hermynmus, the Spartan,\(^ {14}\) who taught him Greek. As a member of the Picard

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Imbart de la Tour, Origines, III, 117.}
\item \textit{Lefèvre d'Étapes a Beatus Rhenanus, April 9, 1519, ibid., n. 2.}
\item \textit{Barnaud, Études, 8.}
\item \textit{In his 1603 edition of the Logico, Lefèvre speaks of an old manuscript "quod mihi praecesseret et singularis amicus Ioannes Lascaris communicavit," Louis Delaruelle, Guillaume Budé, Paris, 1907, 63, n. 2. Tilley says he must have received lessons from Lascaris after his first visit to Italy, \textit{The Dawn of the French Renaissance}, Cambridge, 1916, 248.}
\item \textit{Amann says Hermynmus taught Lefèvre Greek at Paris, "Lefèvre d'Étapes," DTC, IX, i, 184; Renaudet thinks that he learned the elements of the language in Italy and perfected his knowledge of it after his return to Paris, Préréformes, 132, n. 2. His first work manifesting a knowledge of Greek is his 1487 edition of the Ethicus. It seems that Lefèvre studied Greek at Paris but not during his student days there. Whenever or wherever this was mainly done, Hermynmus did teach him, as is evident from a source quoted in Graf, "Georgius Hermynmus et Paulus Eulius...quorum ille ut mihi pater, hic uero ut dominus et benevolentia fraterna, uterque autem ut mihi praecesser est," \textit{Faber Stapulensis}, IHT, XXII, 7.}
\end{itemize}
nation and probably its procurator, he must have been thoroughly acquainted with the books it required every candidate for a degree to know. These included Priscian's Syntax, later replaced by the twelfth-century tracts, Evard de Bethune's Greciannus and Alexander de Villedieu's Doctrinale, Donatus' Treatise on the Figures of Grammar, Aristotle's Organon, and Boethius' Topicos and his Treatise of Divisions. Due to the preponderant position of logic at Paris, the Organon was studied to a much greater degree than the other works of Aristotle. Boethius' translation of Porphyry's Isagoge or introduction to the Categories and Petrus Hispanus' Summulae were also known by every arts student. Neither Porphyry nor Boethius completely adhered to the thought of Aristotle, but each used the master's text to back up his own arguments, and the "parva logicalia" or the last seven treatises into which the Summulae is divided, contains much that has little in common with Aristotle. In fact, the Aristotle so predominant at the university was an Aristotle disfigured over the years by translation, abridgment, and commentaries, and more reliance was placed on the inadequate commentaries than on the original.

Exposed to such unsatisfactory learning, it may have been at this

16 César Égasse Du Boulay (Bulaeus) says our Lefèvre was the procurator, Historia Universitatis Parisiensis, Paris, 1673, VI, 941-942, but the accuracy of this statement is difficult to determine. Although the registers of the university have been preserved, the name Jacques Fabry appears several times. Barnaud lists some persons by the name of Fabry with whom Lefèvre could easily be identified, Études, 6-7. The surname Fabry, very common in France, was borne by several masters of the university as well as by many students, Graf, "Faber Stapulensis," ZHT, XXII, 4, n.

16 Barnaud, Études, 10-11.
early date in Lefèvre's career that he came to realize the desirability of revising the general curriculum and particularly of purifying the texts of Aristotle. In any case, by 1488 or 1489, he had received his master of arts degree,\textsuperscript{17} and, though he may have studied some theology, he never took his doctorate in that field.\textsuperscript{18} While certain authors label him "un prêtre,"\textsuperscript{19} Jourdan, who also states that by the year he received his arts degree he was a priest, remarks that we cannot now determine whether he ever actually exercised the functions of the priesthood or held a benefice, but that his ecclesiastical status corresponded with that of a clerical fellow of Oxford or Cambridge of the present day.\textsuperscript{20}

An appropriate link in the discussion of Lefèvre's own student experiences at the university and the reforms he was soon to advocate is his own statement on an ideal education and its ultimate aim, sketched in his 1506 commentary on the \textit{Politics}. Good authors, such as Virgil, Baptista Mantuanus, and Prudentianus in verse, and Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Filelfo in prose,

\textsuperscript{17} Gilmore is somewhat unique in holding that Lefèvre took his doctor's degree at the University of Paris, \textit{Humanism}, 216.

\textsuperscript{18} This was a reason for constant reproach by his enemies when he dared to invade the province of matters suited only for a professional theologian. Noël Bédier later said: "Cum quis quavis in arte magistrum agere præsumat sub cujus magistris nuncum fuerit discipulus," Renaudet, \textit{Préféiforme}, 130.

\textsuperscript{19} Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," \textit{DTC}, IX, 1, 133; Barnaud holds that he never exercised his priestly functions, \textit{Etudes}, 11.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Catholic Reform}, 82.
must be read in the original texts without the addition of glosses. After a student has completed his studies in the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, he should drink from the pure sources of the *Physics*, the *Ethics*, and the *Politics*. This course should be followed by a study of the metaphysical works of Aristotle. These would show him how to interpret reverently the Holy Scriptures and thus to "take as his companions" such writers as Cyprian, Hilary, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Athanasius, Nazianzen, and the Damascene. Then, after purging his mind and gaining control of his senses by these studies, the generous soul might rise to still loftier heights of contemplation with the help of the works of Nicholas of Cusa and the divine Dionysius. One is tempted to hold that Lefèvre's works were all to be part of one single and consistent design—from grammar and rhetoric to Aristotle, from the Stagirite to the Scriptures and the Fathers, from these to the mystical writers, and then upward to the real contemplation of the Divine Essence. Actually this was somewhat the path of his own development.

---

21 Graf states that Lefèvre attended more to what these authors said than to the skill with which they said it; later on, when occupied with biblical studies, he discarded the reading of certain classical poets who spoke too freely of sin and easy living and were carelessly put into the hands of youth, "Faber Stapulensis," ZBT, XXII, 10. Lefèvre did indeed condemn in 1512 most of the pagan poets, including Catullus, Terence, and Ovid: "O Plini, O Luciane, O inselix Epicure: O surdi et cæci et quotquot hujus inseliciis scholas hae in partes sunt discipuli. O duæs surdorum et saecorum: suris et cæcis deteriores," Epistole diui Pauli apostoli cum commentariis preclarissimi viri Jacobi Fabri Stapulensis, Parrhasius, 1617, 2 Cor., 5, fol. 110; cf. ibid., 1 Cor., 15, fol. 104.

Although Lefèvre was acquainted with the philosophic systems and quarrels of the later Middle Ages, he himself was neither a Thomist nor a Scotist. On the question of universals, he was somewhat connected with nominalism, although he did not interpret the doctrines of this school with the narrowness of the terminist group. In fact, he reproached them with falsifying William of Ockham’s thought when they abandoned the science of realities for their preoccupation with physics and ethics. In his edition of Aristotle’s _Organon_, where he defends himself in advance against attacks directed against his method of interpretation and his criticisms of scholastic theologians, Lefèvre concerns himself only with "des logiciens terministes" of the Ockhamist school and not with St. Thomas whom, without doubt, he did not know.

Important vistas of thought were to open before him on his first voyage to Italy. Here scholars were attempting the accurate restoration of the texts of ancient philosophy, and, in some circles, there was a strong desire to synthesize Neoplatonism and Christianity. Although there is little agree-

23 In 1490, the scholarly Bavarois, Jean d’Abensberg (Aventinus), reported that he had often heard Lefèvre and Josse Clichtove reproach Peter Lombard for having altered the source of divine philosophy, turning it into the muddy mires of his _Questions_, Herminjard, _Correspondance_, I, 20, n. 1.

24 In one of Lefèvre’s lectures on Porphyry’s _Isagoge_ at the college of Cardinal Lemoine in Paris in 1504, Beatus Rhenanus took notes of his words when he recalled nominalist doctrines and cited them with approval, adding "Quamvis haec vera et pulchra sint," _Bibl. de Selestat_, MS. 435, cited in Renaudet, _Préférences_, 131, n. 1.

25 Ibid., 131.

ment on the year of Lefèvre's first trip to Italy and the places and persons
he visited, we have a general idea of his activity.

It seems that he left France in the winter of 1491-1492, accompanied
by Guillaume Goutier, his former pupil and now his secretary.27 First he
visited the Lombard plains, and soon he was in the midst of the scholars work-
ing to restore the texts of ancient philosophy. Those at Venice and Padua
centered their work mainly on Aristotle, while the Florentines devoted them-
selves to the Platonic texts. Lefèvre desired to become acquainted with the
methods they used in their work.

There is some question as to whether he followed a course of
Aristotelian studies at Pavia or Padua under Argyropoulos, who died in 1486.
Actually, a solution to this problem would depend upon the date of Lefèvre's
arrival in Italy.28 On his first journey, he either did not visit Venice at
all or stayed there for only a very short time, but he did stop there in 1500
on his way to Rome for the jubilee celebration. Lefèvre named some of the
Venetian nobility he met, including Hermolac Barbaro.29 Since Beatus Rhenanus

27 Introduction to the Metaphysics, cited in Barmaud, Études, 12.

28 Imbert de la Tour maintains that Lefèvre did meet Argyropoulos,
Origines, II, 562, but Tilley thinks he was already dead by the time Lefèvre
arrived, French Renaissance, 234, n. 8. In any case, the words of Beatus
Rhenanus still stand: "Jacobus Faber...philosophiam...ita illustravit, ut
Hermolac Barbaro et Argyropyle Byzantie, praeceptoribus olim suis, haec longe
plius nitidius attulerit," Beatus Rhenanus to Reuchlin, Du Boulay, Historia,
VI, 492.

29 After praising certain nobles of Venice, Lefèvre remarks: "stäi
melios alios praetere Hermolam Barbarum, Hieronymum Donatum, Petrum Pascalium,
Vincentium Quirim nossem, id dicer e oportuit," Politicorum libri octo,
cited in Delamuelle, Guillaume Budé, 47, n. 1. Cf. Barmaud, who thinks that
Lefèvre must have met Barbaro in Rome, where he was in exile, Frèreformes,
137-138, 144.
spoke of Barbaro as one of Lefèvre's masters, the Venetian must have revealed to him the various techniques used in the textual restoration of Aristotle.

Barbaro's Aristotelianism, we may safely surmise, did not carry the same weight with Lefèvre as the rich Platonicism of the Florentine syncretists. It is certain that Lefèvre visited Florence, though we do not know whether he met Marsilio Ficino personally. In any event, he probably met many close followers of Ficino's thought. Both Barbaro and Ficino had this in common, namely, their desire to struggle against Averroistic materialism and incredulity. Barbaro attempted to do so by rejecting faulty Arabic translations and commentaries on the Stagirite and any elements alien to his system.

Ficino, on the other hand, sought to harmonize the natural and the supernatural by founding a kind of Neo-Platonic "religious metaphysics," formed on the basic idea of a ladder of beings who, having emanated from the Supreme Unity and the Supreme Intelligence, descended by degrees to multiple forms of insensible matter. Man was the bond between the spiritual and the material worlds, and his rational soul occupied the center of this cosmic hierarchy and was free to descend to the world or to raise itself to God. Knowing Lefèvre as we do, he would tend more to a religio-metaphysical doctrine like that of Ficino which would end in contemplation and ecstasy and effect

50 Cf. supra, 26, n. 29.

51 Imbert de la Tour believes that Lefèvre was subject to the influence of Ficino and his followers since his second voyage to Italy in 1500, Origines, II, 289, but Lefrançais thinks this trip did not hold the place in Lefèvre's life attributed to it by Imbert de la Tour, for Ficino had died in 1499, Grands Écrivains de la Renaissance, Paris, 1914, 72-73, n. 1.
the renunciation of sensual things and the union of the soul with God. Herein lay the connection between this Neoplatonic religious philosophy and mysticism.

Ficino, like Nicholas of Cusa, had universalist tendencies; he desired to draw all men, even atheists and sceptics, to Christ through Platonic philosophy. He went so far as to maintain that both Plato and St. Paul meant the same thing by Love—the love of God, Absolute Beauty. He saw essentially the same meaning in Plato's view that we were reminded of the universal Ideas we once saw in a supra-sensible world by the sight of their temporal and material imitations and Paul's statement that the invisible things of God could be understood by means of creatures. Ficino was highly indebted to St. Augustine for some of his leading ideas, especially the Platonic theory of forms and also divine illumination, where we learn nothing but in and through God, the Light of the soul.

In Ficino, there was a strongly-marked syncretistic element, a synthesis of Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, along with Sts. John, Paul, and Augustine, and even a pagan figure like Hermes Trismegistus.32 Lefèvre's contact with Ficino's thought, therefore, enabled him to become familiar with the ideas of many figures important in the history of philosophic and religious thought. More than this, he beheld for the first time a system based on a synthesis of the basic elements in all their thought. Ficino's

32 Gilson adds that Ficino's early writings show he was "full of scholastic theology." While he fully intended to be a Platonist and to make Plato "Christianae veritati simillimum," he was actually continuing the history of Christian thought in the Middle Ages, Christian Philosophy, 603-604, n. 82.
mysticism enabled him to read Christianity into Plotinus and an amalgam of Christianity and Neoplatonism into Plato, and Lefèvre would soon be doing the same thing. Ficino went farther, however, for he considered the combination of the Platonic and Christian heritages akin to a new stage in divine revelation.33

Lefèvre also came into intimate association with John Pico della Mirandola.34 Their spirits were obviously compatible. Festugière even says that Lefèvre "s'exaltera comme Pio dans un ascétisme tourmentes d'amour divin,"35 and sees in their great intent to find in philosophy a road to God "l'une des fleurs les plus rares du premier humanisme."36 Pico was even more syncretistic than Ficino; in 1487, he tried to show how Hellenism and Judaism, as represented by the Gabbala, could be synthesised in a Platonic-Christian system. He was strongly influenced by the "negative theology" of Neoplatonism and the Pseudo-Dionysius.37 In his famous De ente et uno, he held that God is the One, not Being but above Being, comprising in Himself all perfections in undivided unity in an ineffable manner which exceeds our understanding. He argued that

33 The account of Ficino's ideas has been drawn mainly from Renaudet, Préréformes, 139-140, 143, and from Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy, Westminster, Maryland, 1953, III, 211-213.


35 Ibid., 144.

36 Ibid., 185.

37 Copleston, Philosophy III, 213.
to us God is in darkness, so much does He transcend the world He has created.
Yet, in his Heptaplus, he held that it was by His Passion that Christ opened
the way for man to enter the supracelestial world and to reach God Himself.
Though he was mainly a Platonist, Pico was neither anti-Aristotelian nor
anti-scholastic, but incorporated into his system aspects of both Aristotle
and Plato. This may have been one of the reasons that he and Lefèvre were
so united: "Tous deux aristoteliciens, tous deux mystiques, Pio et Lefèvre
se reconnaissent frères."

The ground truly common to Ficino, Pico, and Lefèvre was the view
that philosophic speculation has its basis in divine love. For the Florentine
philosophers, Platonism was the résumé of human wisdom, the only way to re-
juvenate Catholicism and to spiritualize Catholic doctrine. The basic sig-
nificance of their syncretistic plan was the appeal it would have to a
Christian humanist and contemplative scholar like Lefèvre, disgusted with

38 On the advice of Pico, Lefèvre for three years studied the
philosophers, including courses on Aristotelian morals and the method of
explaining the Organon. Renaudet, Préréformes, 141.

39 Pico even spoke of St. Thomas as "the splendour of our theology,"
and cited the scholastics, É. Garin, ed., Heptaplus, 222, cited in Copleston,
Philosophy, III, 215.

40 In fact, at the time of his death, Pico left unfinished his
De Concordia Platonis et Aristotelis, where this synthesis was to be worked out.


42 Abel Lefranc, "Le Platonisme et la littérature en France à
l'époque de la Renaissance (1500-1550)," Revue d'histoire littéraire de la
France, III, 1896, 3.
scholasticism and disappointed in the Catholicism of his time. This plan gave him an ideal to work with to which contemporary interior religion did not approach.

Though Lefèvre was exposed to all these strains of thought in Italy, he never took sides in the contest among the favorers of Plato and Aristotle. He preferred to keep a middle road. His writings indicate that he had made on his own a conscientious study of both philosophers, and, in the words of Symphorien Champier, he wished to be ranged "no more among the Platonists than among the Aristotelians." This was because he did not study philosophy for its own sake. His mysticism led him to see elements of great value to his system in both philosophies. The same type of mysticism which Ficino used to see Christian elements in Neoplatonism and Plato himself led Lefèvre to look on Aristotle as a universal and almost a Christian philosopher. "Those who predicate ideas are Platonists; those who follow the divine and eternal doctrines are Aristotelians," Lefèvre remarked in his introduction to the

43 Abel Lefranco, "Marguerite de Navarre et le Platonisme de la Renaissance," Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes, LVIII, 1897, 274. It seems irrelevant for the purposes of this study to argue which of the two philosophic influences predominated in Lefèvre. Lefranco thinks he was mainly an Aristotelian, and that, if he seemed to hold any ideas resembling Ficino's, he received them through the Christian Neoplatonism of the Pseudo-Dionysius and the strange and pagan conceptions of Hermes Trismegistus, "Le Platonisme et la littérature en France," Rev. hist. lit., III, 4-5; cf. his Grands écrivains français, 70-71. Renaudet notes that by 1600 Lefèvre was already familiar with Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines, though he did not concern himself too much with them, preferring to work on Aristotle, Préreformes, 282.
His view of Aristotle would have surprised none more than
Aristotle himself, but it explains why, though an ardent follower of the
Stagirite, he was able to pass without effort to Platonism and Neoplatonism
and to be at the same time a follower of Aristotle, Plato, and Plotinus.45

Lefèvre returned to Paris to act in accord with these new philosoph-
ical influences. Even before his trip, he had been lecturing in 1490 in the
college of Cardinal Lemoine,46 and continued to teach there after his return
until 1507. But now he combined teaching with the task of restoring
Aristotelian texts. He had observed the need for this when he himself had
been a student at the University of Paris and during his years as a young
teacher there, but, after the Italian trip, he knew the techniques involved.

It was mainly to his own pupils that he communicated this ardor for
the restoration of the ancient philosophy. Among them were the famous

44 Tilley, French Renaissance, 246.
45 Ibid.
46 Jean d'Abensberg attended Lefèvre's lectures in that year,
Hermijard, Correspondance, I, 20, n. 1. He taught some mathematics and had
the distinction of helping Guillaume Budé acquire a taste for this discipline,
ibid., 27, n. 1. The College of Cardinal Lemoine itself had a great renown.
According to its statutes, theology was to occupy a principal position, but
actually the program of the faculty of arts had superseded it, Barnaud,
Études, 99.
Josse Clichtove and Claude Bouelles, both of France, and even foreigners, Jean Solidi of Cracow, the two Amerbach of Basle, and Beatus Rhenanus of Schlettstadt. Like Lefèvre himself, whom they assisted in editing the Aristotelian texts, his students were influenced by the Florentine philosophers. In 1504 Clichtove had finished his studies of the editions of Plinio and Pico, and, while Beatus Rhenanus was aiding Lefèvre in editing Aristotle's

47 Cf. the excellent article by A. Clerval, "Josse Clichtove," DTC, III, 1908, 238-243. In 1520 Noël Badier classed him with Lefèvre, Erasmus, and Luther as a supporter of the "new opinions," but from April, 1521, when he published his detailed criticism of Luther's doctrines, Determinatio theologicae Facultatis Parisiensis super doctrina lutherana, he seems to have become a warm adherent of the Sorbonne and scholastic theology, Tilley, French Renaissance, 250-251; cf. also P. Feret, who says that by 1521 Clichtove was far from associating himself with the "brave inclinations" of Lefèvre toward the new doctrines of the Rhine, La Faculté de théologie de Paris et ses docteurs les plus célèbres, Paris, 1900-1901, II, 57. L. Cristiani treats Clichtove as one of the writers against the new heresy; in his Antilutherus, he upheld the power of the Church to impose obligations and sanctions in opposition to the "Christian liberty" advocated by Luther, the Mass, the priesthood, and monastic vows, "Josse Clichtove et son Antilutherus (1524)," Revue des questions historiques, 1911, LXXXIX (XLV, nov. sér.), 120-134. Apparently, Clichtove shrewdly recognised that even moderate reform such as that advocated by his old master and colleague, Lefèvre, was apt to be confused with the heretical Lutheran tenets. Even the friends of Lefèvre probably misinterpreted Clichtove's apparent defection from their ranks when they described him as "Clichtoveus olim noster!" Hermannjard, Correspondance, I, 20, no. 1.

48 Beatus Rhenanus studied philosophy under Lefèvre from 1503 to 1507. The library at Schlettstadt possesses his books, their margins covered with notes which are a living echo of Lefèvre's lessons. It was, in fact, Beatus who informed us of the extraordinary reputation of Lefèvre among his disciples, Delaruelle, Guillaume Budé, 46, n. 1. When Beatus returned to his own land, he edited several classical authors, and he is, in fact, well-known in the literary history of the sixteenth-century for his critical and historical works. He also made known the ideas of Lefèvre to his Alsacian friends, John Wimpfeling and Sebastian Brant, Villoslada, Universidad de Paris, 223; cf. Lucas, Renaissance, 373-374, for information on Wimpfeling and Brant.
politics, he acquired texts of Pico to use in a study of Platonism.

Lefèvre's main intention in editing and publishing Aristotle's works was to place in the hands of students versions more exact than those presently in circulation. He knew that it would do little good to publish the Greek text, for this language was little known. He wrote brief introductions stressing the subject of the Aristotelian treatises with short glosses alongside to reassert Aristotle's thought and to show where the ancient philosophy differed with more modern considerations. His method, then, was the old and time-honored one of introduction, paraphrase, and commentary, and was indicative of Lefèvre's cautious spirit.

The contributions of Lefèvre and his circle to a purer Aristotle followed one after another. In 1492 came a paraphrase of eight books of the Physics, followed by an introduction to the first six books of the Metaphysics, with two dialogues on the Physics and four on the Metaphysics; in 1494, an introduction to the Magna Moralia, and, in 1496, an introduction to the Hellenistic Ethics, followed in 1497 by three Latin translations of the latter work, accompanied by a moral introduction to the Ethics.

Lefèvre felt that the study of morality does not require long disputes on the meaning of words, but rather a balanced intelligence inspired by right sentiments. Many commentators on the Ethics, he felt, imagined only extraordinary situations which never occurred, and it was not the purpose of
ethics to resolve such theoretical questions. Note here the stress on the practical and the implied anti-intellectualism. In his own ethical commentaries, Lefèvre mixed counsels and exhortations. To illustrate the Ethics, he relied upon the poets, orators, and historians of antiquity, citing Terence, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Homer, Hesiod, and Plutarch, and thus evincing a knowledge of Greek and Roman thought and civilisation. Lefèvre implied that the ancient pagan moralists had mysteriously received a part of revelation.

His 1497 work on the Nicomachean Ethics consisted simply in publishing the translations made by the Italian humanists which he had obtained on his travels; the first was that of Argyropoulos, the second that of Leonardo Bruni, and the third and old translation attributed to a Dominican, Henry Kosbein of Brabant. This same volume also contained Georgio Valla's translation of the Magna Moralia, which Lefèvre dedicated to Budé, and an introductory dialogue by Bruni. In 1503 appeared an edition of Boethius' translation of the Organon with paraphrases. Three years later he issued the Politics and Economics in versions attributed to Bruni. Bruni's work was accompanied by seven books of what Lefèvre termed Hecatonemia, a collection of precepts or leges from the works of Plato. The first book consisted in a hundred such

50 Renaudet, Préréforme, 281; cf. the exact Latin quotations from his works, ibid., 282-284 and nn.

51 Ibid.

52 Tilley, French Renaissance, 237.
laws called *Socratisae leges*, while the remaining six hundred were called
*Platonicae leges*. These additions to Bruni's works are a practical indication
of Lefèvre's interest in Plato as much as in Aristotle. In 1508 came his
introduction to the *Politics*. Cardinal Bessarion's translation of the *Meta-
physics*, which had come into Lefèvre's hands through Pico, was published in
1516. This concluded the series of translations from Aristotle, although in
1518 he undertook a new version of the *Physica*.53

We stated in the beginning of this study that the term "reformer,"
as applied in general to the Christian humanists and in particular to Lefèvre
d'Étапles, meant not only a religious or a philosophical reformer but also an
educational reformer. This is here most evident. While teaching at the
college of Cardinal Lemoine and even later until 1617, Lefèvre was intent on
educational methods and, in addition to all his textual editions, he published
treatises on music and on arithmetic and mathematics, including the elements
of Euclid. In his *Astronomicon*, he deplored the pseudo-science of astrology
and horoscopes. Lefèvre's little-known *Commentary on the Sphere of Sacrobosco*

53 The titles of these works and their dates of publication have
been taken from Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étапles," *DTG*, IX, 1, 134, and Tilley,
*French Renaissance*, 234-236. For a complete bibliography of the first editions
of Lefèvre's works on Aristotle and other subjects of the arts course at
was published at Venice in 1508. In 1500 appeared a completely original work, *Introductio in terminorum cognitionem*.

But it was not only with the humanists of the Italian Renaissance that Lefèvre was in contact during the early years of the sixteenth century. Thoroughly imbued with Christian humanism, he felt obliged to intervene when the Cologne theologians opposed John Reuchlin's scientific study of Greek and Hebrew as a preparation for the study of both sacred and profane letters. Reuchlin had requested Lefèvre's aid, hoping that he, as an alumnus of Paris, would speak to the Sorbonne in Reuchlin's favor should the Cologne faculty ask the Paris theologians for their opinion in this controversy. The German felt that in general the theologians were against him for the introduction of Greek and Hebrew just as they were opposed to Lefèvre for seeking to purify Aristotle, and that actually they had contempt for the new studies for fear that they would push out the old ones.

54 *Fabricius, "Faber Stapulensis," Bibliotheca Latina, VI, 422. The Sphere of John Sacroboseo was the most popular introductory textbook on astronomy and cosmology from the early thirteenth century, when it was written, until the seventeenth century, Lynn Thorndike, "Robertus Anglicus and the Introduction of Demons and Magic into Commentaries upon the Sphere of Sacroboseo," Speculum, XXI, 1946, 241. In accord with his views against astrology, Lefèvre's comments were scientific, unlike those of earlier commentators on Sacroboseo's work, namely, Robertus Anglicus who spoke at length in 1271 of the influences of celestial bodies, a world soul and separate movers for each planet, ibid., 245, or Michael Scot, Robertus' contemporary, who also included some astrology, and Cecco d'Ascoli in the fourteenth century with his accent on demonology, "Jean de Sacro-Bosco," Histoire littéraire de la France, XIX, 1838, 3.

55 For a brief account of this controversy as it developed, cf. Gilmore, *Humanism*, 197-199.

Lefèvre had the unpleasant task of informing Reuchlin that the Sorbonne had pronounced against him. Yet he counselled his fellow-humanists to be courageous in upholding his position and not to be discouraged, since the faculty's sentence was a purely scientific one and did not involve orthodoxy. In spite of the eminent doctors, he urged Reuchlin to insist on his cause, for it would be heard before his judges: "If you are victorious, we humanists will be victorious with you—"Si vinces, nos tecum vicimus."57 In spite of Lefèvre's notably weak assurance to Reuchlin that the Cologne and Paris decisions were not too great a setback, he and other Christian savants knew well that this controversy did touch them, that Reuchlin was in some measure fighting their battle, and that the triumph of the conservative theological faculties would mean a grave setback for the cause of the "new learning."

At this point, Lefèvre was in direct relations with Erasmus. As Christian humanists, both felt that humanity must draw its most profound wisdom from Scripture,58 and this was based on their desire for simplification, their hope of returning to an active and sincere faith, and their wish for educational...


58 It is here evident that the literary humanist and religious reformist aspects of Lefèvre's work cannot be separated; at the time the famous incident between Lefèvre and Erasmus occurred, cf. infra, 40, Lefèvre had already published his Psalter, 1509, and his Pauline Commentaries, 1512, and was engaged in the famous "three Maries" controversy with the Sorbonne, cf. infra, 118-124. Likewise with Erasmus, whose New Testament was published in 1516. When criticism was levelled against him for having undertaken a revision of the text of the New Testament, he cited the example of Lefèvre, "amicus noster," who did on Paul what Erasmus did with the New Testament. Why was this permitted Lefèvre and not Erasmus, he asked, for Lefèvre had dared
However, they were different in that Lefèvre felt the need of intimately uniting mystical illumination with objective knowledge, while Erasmus brought to the study of religious questions a kind of coldness that could be compared with Greek rationalism. For Erasmus it was:

La foi, mais non le mysticisme; les faits, mais non les formules, c'est une conception beaucoup plus simple et plus claire que celle qui convenait au tempérament de Lefèvre.

The differences between Erasmus and Lefèvre were even exemplified by their voyages to Italy. In 1492 Lefèvre sought above all to know the Aristotelianism of Barbero and the mystical thought of Pico and Pico. In 1500 he went again to Rome for the jubilee year as a simple pilgrim to gain indulgences. In 1506, however, Erasmus went to seek first those humanists, like Pietro Bembo, who were passionately interested in the classics. In their visits to Rome, both Erasmus and Lefèvre had become convinced of the abuses in the seat of the Roman Church. But Lefèvre waited until 1512 to speak against these abuses and then moderately, citing Julius II's violence and ambition.

---

59 Although Erasmus insisted on the necessity of educational reforms, he expressed his unquieting realization that there were some dangers to religion from classical studies. Erasme de Rotterdam à Wolfgang Fabritius Capiton, Anvers, 26 février, 1517, ibid., 29-30. Cf. Supra, 24, for Lefèvre's views on this point during these years.

60 Mann, Érasme, 11-12; cf. also Renaudet, Pré-réforme, 487-488.

61 Ibid., 701.
and the lack of the prelates' seal, while Erasmus almost immediately tirad
against them in 1508 in his Praise of Folly.

In October, 1514, Lefèvre wrote his first enthusiastic letter to
the erudite Erasmus, expressing for him a fellow-humanist's love as he wrote
"Quis non suspiciat, amat, colat Erasum? Nemo non, qui bonus et literatus
fuerit."62 The kinship they felt in working toward the same objectives con-
tinued even after their dispute involving Scriptural interpretation. In his
1512 edition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 2, 7, Lefèvre had proposed the
reading: "Thou hast made him a little lower than God" instead of "than the
angels." In his New Testament of 1516, Erasmus rejected this interpretation,
and thereby incurred the animosity of Lefèvre when he published his second
edition of Paul's Epistles in 1517.63 Erasmus countered with his Apologia
contra Fabrum Stapulensem.64

62 Le Fèvre d'Etaples à Erasme de Rotterdam, Paris, 23 octobre,
(1514), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 18-19.

63 Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters, trans.
and ed. Preserved Smith, Philadelphia, 1913-1916, I, 69-70, n. 1. It is
interesting to note that, in Lefèvre's later translation of the much-discussed
passage, he returned to the version of the Vulgate and Erasmus.

64 Apparently, Erasmus had been annoyed with Lefèvre once before
this; the cause was the publication of the latter's 1512 Commentaries. Erasmus
wrote to Martin Van Dorp, the young Dutch theologian, how very unfortunate it
was that it had occurred neither to Erasmus himself nor to Lefèvre, in the
course of their very intimate conversations, to mention the work each had in
progress. Erasmus, added, however, how warmly he approved of Lefèvre's under-
taking. Allen, II, esp. 337, 11, 574 ff., cited in Tilley, French Renaissance,
300. These "intimate conversations" must have occurred in 1511, Ibid., n. 3.
The quarrel among two such illustrious humanists rocked intellectual Europe. Even Luther was interested. Capiton had informed him that the Apologia was being reprinted at Basle. The German heretic mentioned this when recommending various books to John Lang at Erfurt so that his book dealers, about to set out for the Frankfort fair, would know what to procure.65 Luther himself must have promptly obtained Erasmus' book, for he sent a copy of it to Spalatin, indicating how sorry he was that discord should have arisen between "two such princes of letters." Luther judged Erasmus the victor in the literary duel. He felt, however, that, in spite of their disagreement, Erasmus wished to remain friendly with Lefèvre.66 At this point, the German seems to have viewed the quarrel between Lefèvre and Erasmus primarily as a quarrel of humanists in the realm of letters, but, at the same time, he was evaluating their spiritual assets.

65 Luther to John Lang, Wittenberg, February 19, (1518), Luther's Correspondence, I, 71-72.
66 Luther to Spalatin, Wittenberg, January 19, 1518, ibid., 69-70.
CHAPTER III

LEFEVRE D'ETAPLES: DEVELOPING RELIGIOUS INTERESTS

Lest we lose sight of Lefèvre d'Étapes as a man in the process of tracing his religious thought, let us turn to the few facts of his middle life. He lectured at the college of Cardinal Lemoine until 1507 when he moved to the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés where his friend, Guillaume Briconnet, had just been appointed abbot.

The new conditions influenced Lefèvre's life and affected his work profoundly. Briconnet combined his interests in religious reform and scholarly pursuits. He made Saint-Germain a center of religious studies, and gathered into his fold savants of all types, including Hebraists and Hellenists, who, like Lefèvre, made good use of the abbey's fine library. More than this, a

---

1 Lefèvre had probably met Briconnet at the University of Paris through Clichtove from whom Briconnet received instructions in philosophy and theology, Doumergue, Jean Calvin, I, 80. Cf. Baraund who notes that it is uncertain whether he had followed Lefèvre's lessons at Paris, though, as his disciple, he was certainly under his influence, Études, 102. In any case, Briconnet and Lefèvre must have been in relations for some time before 1505, since Lefèvre dedicated to his friend a tract on Pimander in his edition of the Liber de potentate et sapientia Dei of Hermes Trismegistus. In Lefèvre's later life, the friendship of the abbot proved most significant, since, through Briconnet's late father, called the Cardinal of St. Malo, he enjoyed much royal favor, while, through his own title of Count of Montbrun, he ranked high in the nobility.

2 Lefèvre recognized that he and Briconnet had common interests; he even entrusted him with some manuscripts of Philo of Alexandria, Le Fevre d'Étapes à Beatus Rhenanus, Paris, 9 avril, (1519), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 45.
truly practical religious reform dominated the life of Saint-Germain.

Brignonnet, a good man, sought to see his abbey return to the exact observances of the religious life; monks who did not wish to comply with the plans he laid out for the reform were free to leave. He placed serious accent on psalmody in the lives of the religious.

One of Lefèvre's closest associates during this period was Guillaume Farel. In 1517, Farel had become a master of arts, and, apparently on the recommendation of Lefèvre, received a position on the faculty of the college of Cardinal Lemoine as a teacher of grammar and philosophy. At this time, he seems to have been inspired by Lefèvre's ideas on the education of youth. By about 1522 or 1523 he was already a militant apostle of the type of radical religious reform he was soon to spread in the Swiss cantons.

Thus, he had already embraced the tenets of the Revolt when he wrote his L'Épître à tous seigneurs and his Du vray usage de la croix, in both of which he mentioned Lefèvre. He related that his friend had the greatest reverence for images of any man he knew and that he knelt in prayer before them for long hours. Farel often accompanied Lefèvre. Together they visited

3 Barnaud says that it cannot be established whether Farel was formally instructed by Lefèvre at Paris, but that, as his follower, he was under Lefèvre's influence, Études, 108. But cf. Comité-Farel for the observation that Lefèvre was no longer teaching at Paris when Farel arrived in 1569, Guillaume Farel, 1489-1565, biographie nouvelle, écrite d'après les documents originaux par un groupe d'historiens, professeurs, et pasteurs de Suisse, de France et d'Italie, Neuchâtel et Paris, 1950, 102.

4 Ibid.
the churches and made pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints where they placed flowers. Lefèvre, Farel noted, was scrupulously exact in the performance of his religious duties and was especially punctual in his attendance at Mass. His "idolatry" was still great in 1514, when he sought to replace an image of the goddess Isis with a black cross before which good women could say their prayers. Farel recounted that in 1519, when Lefèvre came to realize "la grosse idolatrie qui estoit es prières des Saintots," he abandoned his work of writing an account of the lives of the saints whose feasts were celebrated in the Roman Church, even though he had already printed the sections for January and February.

Some thirty-five years later, Farel would recall the words which Lefèvre had spoken to him during their early friendship: "Guilelme, oportet urben immutari, et tu videbis." But in 1556, Farel was completely absorbed in his tumultuous apostolate, and he interpreted Lefèvre's statement as a prophecy

---

5 L'Épître à tous seigneurs et peuples, ed. J. G. Pick, Genève, 1865, 170-172, cited in Baird, Huguenots, I, 69, n. 2; Comité-Farel, Guillaume Farel, 103; Doumercq, Jean Calvin, I, 90.

6 Du vray usage de la croix, ed. Pick, Genève, 1866, ch. LVI, 129-132, cited in Comité-Farel, Guillaume Farel, 106. Cf. Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 39, n. 5, for Briçonnet's feeling that this statue of Isis should be replaced with a red cross.

that true radical reform would eventually triumph. 6

No other indications remain of Lefèvre's personal life at this time. This lack of information serves as a further testimony to the fact that his activities were all directed to one scholarly and humanistic end.

During the years Lefèvre was devoting his attention to the restoration of philosophic texts, he was also absorbing himself in mystical literature and early Christian writings. His broad acquaintance with mystical thought was probably one of the major reasons for his true appreciation of Italian syncretistic and Christianized Neoplatonic thought. In 1491, he was already publishing the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius upon which he had been laboring from some years. From 1507 to 1520, a period which Lefèvre also devoted to patristic study, he continued to ponder over and edit works of mystical theology, not only those of the writers of the early Church and the Middle Ages but also of the contemporary German and Flemish mystics. While Lefèvre and his group were laboring with Aristotelian texts, he began to realize that the work of returning to the basic thought of Christian antiquity was of even more vital and permanent value than any purely philosophic restoration. The Middle Ages had preferred to use the Fathers to re-enforce dialectical arguments rather than to acquire through them a better understanding of original Christianity. Nor had they studied the Fathers to know how the present dogmas, practices, sentiments, and religious habits corresponded to the teach-

---

6 Guillaume Farel à Conrad Pellican, 1556, ibid., 481.
ings, rites, and practices of the early Christians. Lefèvre was already well-equipped to edit these important patristic and mystical works; he knew the solid critical philological methods from his work in Aristotle.

In 1507 he published the epistles of St. Ignatius and the letters of St. Polycarp, with the Theologia Damasceni a translation of the De Fide orthodoxa, and followed these with the Opera of Saint Hilary in 1510 and those of Saint Basil in 1520. He also edited some of St. Cyprian's works, which were printed first at Venice and later at Basle in 1527, though he testified that they were full of errors which could be corrected by use of the manuscripts of the religious of St. Victor.

On February 6, 1498-99, he published the Pseudo-Dionysius' Theologia vivificans: cibus solidus, which included Ambrogio Traversari's Latin editions of four Dionysian treatises, the Coelestis hierarchia, the Ecclesiastica hierarchia, the Divina nomina, and the De mystica theologica, together with ten or eleven letters of the Areopagite. Lefèvre admitted that, after Scripture itself, nothing seemed to him as great and as divine as the Dionysian books, and that, to comprehend them, the spirit must place itself in an attitude of prayer. He thought these books so sacred that, unless one would approach them with devotion, piety, humility, and respect, he could draw no profit from them and might even become worse through a study of such holy

---

9 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Etapes," DTC, IX, 1, 135.

10 Le Fèvre d'Etapes à Beatus Rhenanus, Paris, 9 avril, (1519), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 43-44.
things with the improper attitude.\textsuperscript{11}

Although Valla was already attacking the tradition that Dionysius was a disciple of Paul on the grounds of the dissimilarity of their thought, Lefèvre, like Ficino, continued to believe that he was Paul's "first bishop" of Athens. Obviously, Lefèvre would find it difficult to believe that Dionysius was a fifth-century Alexandrian Neoplatonist mystic. If there did exist any similarities between the thought of the Areopagite\textsuperscript{12} and that of the Alexandrians, Lefèvre felt, it must have been that the Neoplatonists took

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Preface to the \textit{Theologia vivificans}, cited in Renaudet, \textit{Préférences}, 376, nn. 5-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} In his theory of ecstasy, the Pseudo-Dionysius stressed the "via negativa" in approaching God. The human mind begins by denying of God the attributes which are peculiar to creatures until it reaches a stage termed "the super-essential darkness," in which all inadequate conceptions of the Deity are stripped away; in this "Darkness of Unknowing," the human mind "renounces all the apprehension of the understanding and is wrapped in that which is wholly intangible and invisible...united...to Him that is wholly unknowable," the province of mysticism, \textit{Myst. Theol.}, ed. C. E. Bolt, London, 1920, 1-3. Copleston, \textit{Philosophy}, II, 94-98. Dionysius ascribed to God all the perfections found in creatures which are compatible with His spiritual Nature but which exist in Him without imperfection; they all apply to Him in a transcendental manner and to creatures only by virtue of their derivation from God, Who, as the Good, is the overflowing Source of creation and its final goal. Neoplatonic terminology is evident in Dionysius' speaking of the Good as the "super-essential Beautiful" and the "super-essential Essence," ibid., 93-94. It is, in fact, quite evident that the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius were an attempt to reconcile Neoplatonic thought with Christianity, since they embody important elements taken from developed Neoplatonism. For example, Dionysius' position on the relation of the world to God was an attempt to combine the Neoplatonic emanation theory with the Christian doctrine of creation, though the Areopagite himself cannot be called a Pantheist. The Deity was considered as One, inconceivable without name, the principle of all life and all thought, to which is attached an eternal chain of beings who gain existence from Him and Who thereby becomes manifold through bringing forth things from Himself; yet He remains One even in this "self-multiplying" act and remains without differentiation even through this process of emanation, \textit{Div. Names}, ed. C. E. Bolt, London, 1920, 2, II, ibid., 97; cf. Renaudet, \textit{Préférences}, 377. Here,
elements from the thought of Paul's disciple and made them their own. Certainly, Dionysius owed none of his thoughts to Plotinus and his followers. Lefèvre could not dismiss the thought that he, who for so many years had been preparing himself for the early Christian thinkers, was not now in direct contact with them. Since Lefèvre considered Dionysius a true follower of the apostle, he found in his works a complete theology, based directly on Pauline instructions, and considered it a kind of primitive interpretation of evangelic doctrine. Through the Coelestis hierarchia, for example, Lefèvre was able to comprehend the mystical institution of the Church as an intermediary between man and the angels and, with its gradation of offices and sacraments, he could see in it an image of the celestial hierarchy.13 While contact with the Areopagite, then, did not introduce Lefèvre to mystical thought, it did help to deepen his feeling for it and aided him to relate it, as Dionysius himself, to Christian dogma.

But by 1491, well before his intimate contact with Dionysius, Lefèvre had finished pondering the first two of Ramon Lull's five books of Contemplations, one tract on the divine attributes, and the other on creation, the ordinance of the world, redemption, the future life, and divine perfection. Lull's object in his work had been to confound the Averroists who affirmed the disaccord between reason and revelation; he desired to sustain the possibility it seems that Dionysius did not clearly recognize the freedom of the act of creation, since he spoke as if creation were a spontaneous overflowing of the Overbrimming Goodness of God. Copleston, Philosophy, II, 98.

13 Renaudet, Préréformes, 377.
of a rational demonstration of Christian dogma. However, he did not accord a capital role to logic and dialectics but instead placed the intellect under the will which, guided by faith and love, would enable the spirit to receive the truth.14 In 1499, Lefèvre published four of the Spaniard's volumes, and, in December, 1505, followed the first volume of his Contemplations. Lefèvre admitted that he found such consolation in it that he desired to quit the world and find solitude in God alone.15

In this development of Lefèvre's own mystical thought, his contact with the famous school of St. Victor was of the greatest significance. Mystical theology for the Victorines formed an integral part of their theologico-philosophical synthesis. Hugh of St. Victor had written in the twelfth century that man learned the existence of God and His Nature by reason and theology, but the highest learning was direct experiential knowledge of Him attained in this life only in mysticism.16 Another Victorine, Richard of St. Victor, had sought to liberate dogma from Aristotelian dialectics and to develop its mystical elements. Lefèvre had studied Richard's famous De Trinitate at the library of the Regulars of St. Victor, and in Richard he found blended together all the rational theology and mysticism which he had so ceaselessly sought. Moreover, in Richard was one of the most fruitful sources of the contemporary

14 Ibid., 134.
15 Cf. infra, 55-56.
16 Copleston, Philosophy, III, 177-178.
mysticism of men like Ruysbroeck, Pierre d'Ailly, and Gerson, who had drawn from the Victorine some of their inspirations, and whose system served as a protest against the dryness and sterility of terminist dialecticians and Scotists. 17

Lefèvre's mystical progress was also intimately associated with the famed fifteenth-century Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa. From 1509, when Briçonnet entrusted him with this task, Lefèvre was occupied in collecting materials for what was to be the most complete and careful edition of the works of Nicholas which had yet appeared. 18 This work, published at Paris in 1514, was preceded by a dedicatory letter to Briçonnet, in which Lefèvre profoundly extolled the Cusan. 19

By his method as much as by his temperament, Nicholas of Cusa was a mystic. Most of the ideas basic to his system could be traced to earlier philosophies that belonged in a wide sense to the Platonic tradition and which

17 Renaudet, Préséformes, 522.

18 Beatus Rhenanus wrote to Reuchlin: "Quoniam Cusani, omnium Germanorum doctissimi, opera a se recognita impressioni tradere Faber Stapulensis/ in animo habet, elapso jam tempore per literas a me rogavit, ut si quae superessent ejus viri opuscula, præsertim Directorium speculantis... exscribi curarem..." Beatus Rhenanus à Reuchlin, 1509, Hermijnard, Correspondance, II, 122, n. 14.

fell into the mystical category. One of the most characteristic aspects of this system was its eclecticism and syncretism: Cusa brought together doctrines from the ancient masters, the Neoplatonic philosophers, and the mystics of the Middle Ages. While he knew and used such mystics as Hugh of St. Victor and John Scotus Eriugena, he was most influenced by Plotinus, the Pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhart.

There was here a link between Cusa and Picino with his Florentine disciples, who likewise studied the theories of the Alexandrian school.

---

20 Nicholas of Cusa held the theory of the "sancta et docta ignorantia," our realisation that the finite mind of man can have no certain knowledge of God's infinity or transcendency; it is in man's confession of this fact that his wisdom consists; only by faith and the illumination of God's grace can man ever immediately contemplate the Divine Essence. Cusa further held the view of the "coincidentia oppositorum," that God, the synthesis of all opposites in one infinite Being, transcends all distinctions found in finite creatures. He taught the "explicatio Dei," that, in the creation of the world, Divine Infinity expresses itself in a multiplicity of finite things, while Divine Eternity expresses itself in temporal succession. Like Picino, he considered man as a microcosm who combines in himself matter and spiritual reality as well, and, like the Pseudo-Dionysius, Cusa emphasised the "via negativa" in man's intellectual approach to God, for, though God is immanent, nonetheless He is transcendent, infinite, and incomprehensible, Lefranc, ibid., 269, and Copleston, Philosophy. III, 236–239, 244.


22 Lefranc succinctly indicates the bond between the Italian syncretists, Cusa, and Lefèvre: "Le cardinal de Cusa peut être considéré comme la personification la plus exacte et la plus résolue, sinon la plus éclatante, des aspirations qui commencèrent à se manifester, vers le milieu du xve siècle, en faveur d'une double réforme ecclésiastique et intellectuelle," ibid., 270.
Lefèvre's mystical soul also revealed itself in his *Quincuplex Psalterium*, published in 1509. We noted that psalmody held an important place at Saint-Germain. Tasting deeply the beauties of the Psalter, Lefèvre desired to bring out a new edition. The first step was the restoration of an intelligible and accurate text. He accomplished this by comparing the extant editions of the psalms and then forming his own edition. This was to be his first experiment in biblical criticism which at the time was a science almost unborn.

His Psalter consisted of five Latin versions of the psalms. The first section contained three versions of St. Jerome: (1) his second version from the Septuagint, the *Gallicum*, that adopted by the churches of Gaul, (2) his first version, the *Romanum*, that adopted by the Roman Church, and (3) his version made directly from the Hebrew, the *Hebraicum*. The second half of the Psalter of 1509 contained (1) the *Vetus*, the old Latin version which was

---

23 In the preface to Lefèvre's work, addressed to Brignonnet, he said that he had consulted many ancient, worn-eaten codices, *Quincuplex Psalterium*, *Gallicum*, *Romanum*, *Hebraicum*, *Vetus*. *Concilium*, Paris, 1509, cited in Jourdan, *Catholic Reform*, 87, n. 1. Jourdan says these manuscripts must have come from the library of Saint-Germain as well as from those of distant monastic communities which contained such deposits, ibid., 87. Indeed, the prefaces of his books show that Lefèvre knew the resources of libraries in Paris, Orleans, Mains, Cologne and the borders of the Rhine, even Italy, Barnaud, *Etudes*, 147, Graf believes that Lefèvre did take extensive journeys, "Faber Stapulensis," *ZNT*, XXII, 17-19 and nn. 33-38. Even a brief encyclopedic article lists declaratively that, after his studies at Paris, Lefèvre voyaged to Europe, Asia, and Africa, "Jacques Fabri, ou le Febvre." *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, nouv. éd., Bruxelles, 1851, IV, 219. Cf. F. Génin, *Lettres de Marguerite d'Angoulême*, Paris, 1841, 278-280, n. 1. Delamuelle points out, however, that the statements that Lefèvre travelled to Asia and Africa rest merely on some allusions, that Symphorien Champier made in 1507 to his "great voyages," Guillaume Budé, 47, n. 2.
in general use prior to Jerome, and (2) Lefèvre's own Consiliatum, his revision of the "Gallican" text. The first three versions were printed in parallel columns just as were the old Latin version and Lefèvre's own text.²⁴

It was obvious that, for Lefèvre, philological work per se would suffice no longer. This external work on the psalms was but a step to something higher. What good is it, he felt, to recite these prayers if they do not appeal to man's soul? In his own edition and interpretation of the psalms, Lefèvre made few references to the critical work of earlier commentators; he was satisfied to give only the affective and spiritual sense in exposition. The practical value of Hebraic psalmody, Lefèvre realized, lay principally in the application of each psalm to Christ the Savior, Love Personified,²⁵ to His Church, or else to the relations between the two. He believed that Psalm CXL announced the heresies which would trouble the Church,²⁶ and, in general, he sought to find the New Testament in the Old.

²⁴ The Psalter was published in July, 1509, and the following November Cardinal Ximénez of Alcalá was already praising the scholarship and science displayed by its editor and the utility of the work, "Carta del Cardenal Jiménez de Cisneros a Carlos Bouelles, discípulo de Lefèvre d'Étapes con un elegio del salterio estapulense," Bevillii Opera (sin portada) Paris, 1510, fol. 167r, cited in Villoslada, Universidad deParis, app. XIII, 444.

²⁵ From psalms I and CL, he took the theme for his own work: "Psalms de Christo Domino, est enim qui habet olavem David et qui claudit et nemo aperit... Laudate dominum in sanctis ejus; ex hebraeo in SANCTO ejus, in Deo et Agno sedenti in throne quem revelata facies conspiciunt beati," cited in Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étapes," DAC, IX, i, 157.

²⁶ Barnaud, Études, 211.
Yet in dwelling on such symbolism in the Psalter, he followed in the path not only of the Fathers but also of many of the humanists, inspired by Neoplatonism. Slowly, Lefèvre came to realize the vital importance for true Christian life of discovering this hidden sense of Scripture. From this biblical undertaking, then, Lefévre's exegetical method showed itself to be an attempt to emphasize the evangelical element in Scripture and to exalt its spiritual value. He intended men to read the Bible, ponder over its words, and through this spiritual exercise reap practical benefits. What doctrines they might deduce from Holy Writ was not his predominant concern. In the preface to his Psalter, Lefèvre stated his purpose which could be applied to all his criticisms:

I must beseech Christ, Who is the beginning and end of all Psalmody, that it may not only be accepted, but that it may prove of service to many to attain happiness.27

While Lefèvre recognized the value of the works of philosophy and piety to which he had been devoting much time and effort, by 1509 he realized more fully than ever before that they were not to be compared to Scripture itself:

Truly, for a long space of time, I have pursued human studies and scarcely tasted of the divine (they, indeed, are venerable, and not to be rashly approached), but so much light appeared to shine forth from that acquaintance with them, however distant, that, in comparison, human learning seemed to be darkness itself.28

27 Jourdan, Catholic Reform, 89.
28 Ibid., 90-91.
During the period he was leaning more and more toward sacred studies, did he experience any religious crises such as Luther and other reformers later would claim they had? A little-known incident in his life may cast some light on this. In the preface to the first volume of Lull’s *Contemplations*, Lefèvre says that about 1491 one of his ailing friends entrusted him with a certain devotional book which stressed divine contemplation. There Lefèvre found great consolation and for a while he toyed with the idea of entering the monastic life—“Il me poussa presque à chercher Dieu dans la solitude, après avoir fui le monde.” After reading the book, he gave it to others; among them were Guillaume le Vaissier, a rich man who left his wealth to enter the cloister, and a Raymond Bueier who, after reading the book, also entered the religious life. Several interruptions, however, hindered Lefèvre’s own desire to do so, including the dissuasions of his friends and the pressure of unfinished studies. During the following years, he continued to remain undecided about entering the monastic life, and suffered from physical weakness, a lack of sleep and loss of appetite. Yet he kept in touch with holy persons, among them John Mauburn, Jean Raulin, and Jean Standonck. Further, he

29 Mauburn, an Augustinian mystic, arrived in Paris from Brussels in 1490 with a mission to reform certain abbeys in the area, among them Livry, where he was appointed abbot in April, 1501. He died at Paris in December of that year, Tilley, *French Renaissance*, 243.

30 Raulin, as director of the college of Navarre, desired to restore clerical studies and was opposed to too many secular courses in the curriculum. He also spoke against the abuses in the Church. Later, he became a monk of Cluny, Dainville, *Naissance*, 3-4.

31 Standonck was principal of the college of Montaigu until 1513 when he was succeeded by Noël Bedier. Dainville labels him a “contra-humanist,” who like Raulin wanted to revivify the Church but was unsuccessful because of his excessive regard for the decadent form of scholastic education and his ultra-orthodox respect for tradition and authority, *ibid.*, 4-8.
published inspirational books, probably to help orientate the monks to mystic contemplation. He became convinced that many of them experienced spiritual aridity in reading Scripture, as they told him, because they understood only its literal sense. Lefèvre was already convinced that all intense religion is mystical, and that true mysticism could rejuvenate a religious life dried up by formalism. It would seem then that Lefèvre's spiritual endeavors during this period served as a kind of compensation for his own failure to enter the cloister.

Fertile sources of mysticism were opened to him during his travels in the Rhenish region, undertaken before the printing of his Psalter was completed on July 31, 1509. In fact, Lefèvre's main object was to seek manuscripts of a mystical character. During the month of July, he was at Mainz and made visits to the Brethren of the Common Life at Cologne and several monasteries on the Rhine. His contacts with the followers of Gerard Groote, originators of the great "Devotion Moderna" movement, were particularly fruitful.

32 Primum volumen Contemplationum Remundi, 1505, cited in Barnaud, Études, 141-142.

33 Ibid., 145-147.

34 Preface to the Quinquplex Psalterium, cited in ibid., 210-211.

35 Tilley, French Renaissance, 243-244.

36 Note the words of Graf: "Er hielt sich in Juli dieses Jahres (1509) in Mainz auf, besuchte viele Klöster am Rhein, und ging auch zu den Brüdern des gemeinschaftlichen Lebens in Köln," "Faber Stapulensis," ZHT, XXII, 18.
He was attracted by their general aim to combine ancient wisdom, the teachings of Christ, the mysticism of the Fathers and the saints with the worthwhile elements in Italian humanism.\textsuperscript{37}

The "Devotio Moderna" illustrates somewhat the noteworthy changes which Italian humanism underwent when it crossed the Alps. Though perpetuating the cult of classical letters, these laymen, interested in the new movement, also took a more profound interest in religion. Their piety, issuing from constant reflection on the sacrifice of Christ, was deep and practical. In great part, it was occupied with moral and ethical problems and aimed at religious reform through the living of religion. The movement found adherents in all strata of society, in monastic houses, in schools, and among the pious burghers of the cities.\textsuperscript{38} The synthesis of their interests in learning and religious reform was in complete accord with the aims of Lefèvre. Thus, the heritage of such figures as John Ruysbroeck, Gerard Groote, and Thomas à Kempis became part of his life.

At Cologne Lefèvre read many of the revelations of visionary monks dwelling on the great evils of the times and the corruptions of prelates and clerics. In other convents and monasteries, he acquired similar manuscripts. Near Bingen, at the convent of the Benedictines of Rupertsberg, he read


\textsuperscript{38} For a recent work on the Brethren, cf. Hyma's The Brethren of the Common Life, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1950.
the rather strange book, *Scivias*, of St. Hildegard (1098-1179), the foundress of this convent. In it she recounted thirteen visions, lashed invectives at monks, clerics, and even popes, and announced both the coming chastisement and purification of the Church. The abbess of Ottenstein, Adelaide, and the abbot of the Benedictines of Rheingau both gave Lefèvre several similar writings which they requested him to publish. He also procured six books in which the Benedictine Egbert recounted, about 1160-1163, the life and visions of his sister, Elisabeth de Schonau (1129-1165), who claimed to have had visions of the Blessed Virgin, the saints, and the scene of the Crucifixion. Through the *Liber speciales gratiae*, Lefèvre learned of the revelations and apparitions of Christ and Our Lady recounted by Saint Mechtild de Hackeborn (1240-1298). In this latter work can be found a rather primitive form of devotion to the Heart of Jesus, and, significantly, a very profound sentiment of the insufficiency of works and salvation by the merits of Christ. These accounts of fervent and saintly nuns Lefèvre brought back with him to Saint-Germain-des-Prés together with the Visions of Robert d'Uzes, a preacher and prophet who died in 1296 at the Dominican monastery of Mets, after having travelled through France, Germany, and Italy preaching the necessity of clerical penance, and even threatening Celestine V and Boniface VIII with divine wrath.

39 St. Hildegard's work is commonly known by this brief title, although Renaudet gives in parentheses the words, "*Scivias Domini,*" *Préreformes*, 601, n. 2. Thus, these three words might possibly be the opening phrase of the book.

40 Ibid., 601 and n. 2, 602.

41 Ibid., 602-603 and n. 3.
In a library at Mains Lefèvre discovered Bernon's treatise on the Mass, which he published on November 23, 1610, and dedicated to all priests. Far from proclaiming indifference to ecclesiastical forms and rites, it rather venerated the Catholic liturgy and the dignity of the priest. Actually it was a summary of the words and actions of the priest in the celebration of the Mass together with a symbolical explanation of the liturgy, especially the prayers and hymns, and was intended to make known to priests the hidden sense of these ceremonies.42 This, of course, would make it appeal to Lefèvre.

One of the most important manuscripts obtained at the house of the Brethren of the Common Life, which Lefèvre brought back with him and published on August 5, 1512, was Groote's translation of Ruysbroeck's book, De Ornatu Spiritualium Nuptiarum. It is interesting to note not only that Lefèvre defended Ruysbroeck against the criticism of Gerson, who had claimed that Ruysbroeck was weak in dogma and ignorant of Latin, but also that he praised the Flemish mystic for his knowledge of nature, astronomy, medicine, and theology. Lefèvre especially commended his having written in the vulgar tongue, and thought that a person well-versed in Latin had a perfect right to write in the vernacular for the common people.43 It may have been that it was through his contact with Ruysbroeck that Lefèvre came to understand how

42 Ibid., 601, 603 and n. 2.
43 Ibid., 622, nn. 2-3; Hyma, Christian Renaissance, 265.
efficacious it was for the spiritual development of the simple people to read devotional books in their own language. In any case, shortly after his return to Paris, he was already expressing his regret that the faithful could not understand the Latin prayers of the Catholic liturgy. Not only, then, did Lefèvre feel the influence of his Cologne stay through the obtaining of mystical productions either written or prepared in the house of the Brethren at Deventer, and, possibly, either the implanting or the germination of the idea of writing in the vernacular for the benefit of the simple common people, but, even more vital in the progression of his thought, maybe even some ideas on the basic question of justification by faith.

It is certain that Lefèvre came into contact with Mauburn's Rosetum exercitationum spiritualium which he induced Badius Ascensius, himself a former pupil of the Brethren at Ghent, to print in 1510 or 1511. By reading Mauburn, Lefèvre was actually imbibing some of the thought in the Tractatulus de Spiritualibus Exercitiis of Florentius Radewijns and in the Tractatus de Spiritualibus Ascensionibus of Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen, for Mauburn

44 "Maxima pars hominum cum uno orat, nescio si spiritu, tamen mente non orat. Nam in lingua orat quam non intelligit," Comm., 1 Cor., 14, fol. 101.

46 Radewijns (1350-1400) was a disciple and co-worker of Groote and one of the pioneers in the Brethren of the Common Life movement. As a successor to Groote at his death, Radewijns became the rector of the Brethren at Deventer.

47 Zerbolt (1367-1398) was a member of the Deventer Brethren from about 1384. He was a scholar, especially familiar with the canon law, and also a writer.
borrowed directly from them not only his whole method but also much of his terminology. 48 Radewijns emphasized man's depravity since his fall in Paradise, his proneness to evil, and the difficulty he experienced in fighting it. But he consoled himself with the thought that, through the sacrifice of Christ, man was not hopelessly lost. He believed that, through his own personal faith and the purification of his heart, man could find love, joy, and peace, and that finally he would be so illumined that he could understand God's tenderness to him as expressed by Calvary. 49 Zerbolt's treatment was similar, explaining man's ascent to perfect love through the example of Christ. 50

Like Radewijns and Zerbolt, Mauburn held that man could return to his original state, but, since he had fallen to such depths, he could do so only by the assistance of grace and the Holy Spirit and religious exercises. Groote's followers, it is true, did make much of the question of grace and good works. Wessel Gansfort, 51 much imbued with the ideals of the Brethren, showed that grace and good works do not exclude each other. He argued that, though God is the source of us and all our possessions, He desires that we work for our salvation, just as He wishes a farmer to labor for a good harvest.

48 Hyma, Christian Renaissance, 255.

49 Ibid., 54-58.

50 Ibid., 79-82.

51 Gansfort (1419-1489) was a product of the school of the Brethren and, though not one of their members, he was nevertheless one of the important agents in the spread of the "Devotio Moderna." He was a mystical scholar, a theologian, philosopher, and writer.
through the agencies which He has provided. Gansfort admitted the necessity
of good works, although, like Groote, he was opposed to too great a reliance
upon purely external observances.52 Thus Gansfort, like the Brethren them-
selves, showed that Paul and James agreed on grace and good works.

Wrapped up in these ideas upon which he had long been meditating
and which no doubt received definite stimulation during his travels in the
valleys of the Rhine and the Moselle, Lefèvre allowed himself to be little
disturbed by the stirring political events then taking place. But, in December
1508, when the League of Cambrai was founded for the ostensible purpose of
driving the Turks from Constantinople,53 Lefèvre seemed to think European
sovereigns were still serious about a crusade against the Moslems. On November
27, 1509, shortly after the publication of his Quinquplex Psalterium, he
published two books of anti-Moslem propaganda. The first was a treatise of
Riccoldo de Monte di Croce, a Dominican monk of Santa Maria Novella de Florence,
which had already been published in Rome in 1508, and the second was a work
on Turkish customs, written by an anonymous Christian of Transylvania who for
a long time had been a Mohammedan prisoner. Lefèvre hated the Turks almost
as much as he did the Averroists.54 Thus, his intellectual crusade against

52 Hyma, Christian Renaissance, 256.
53 The real purpose of the League was action against Venice.
54 Renaudet, Préreformes, 519 and no. 1, 520 and no. 1. Ramon Lull, with whom Lefèvre was familiar, had also been interested in the Moslem world; he wanted to convert them to Christianity by rational arguments.
them need not be considered as extraneous material in a consideration of the
development of his religious thought, but rather as evidence of his deep
devotion to the common Christian cause.

All Lefèvre's work up to this point seemed to coalesce in his famed
Epistole divi Pauli apostoli of 1512. To restore Scripture as it existed in
Christian antiquity, he had concluded that the study of the ancient biblical
manuscripts must take precedence over the study of commentaries, that theology
must be founded on exegesis, and thus that the critical method of the humanists
must be substituted for the logical method then in vogue. He saw well the
connection theology and secular learning; that without languages, no inter-
pretation of Holy W- it was possible, that the study of the ancient tongues
was essential to an intensive study of the manuscripts, and that philology
was the major condition of exegesis.

The humanist in Lefèvre was evident in the apocryphal additions
in the appendix to his volume. This was the first innovation. A second point
of significance and the most important, was Lefèvre's own new translation of
the Epistles made directly on the Greek and printed aside the Vulgate version.
Now that a humanist and a simple master of arts had dared to take liberties
with the official text of Scripture, textual criticism was in some degree
emancipated from the control of professional theologians.

On a more lofty plain too Lefèvre's earlier work influenced his
first biblical Commentaries. We noted in detail how he had become thoroughly
saturated with ancient, medieval, and contemporary mystical thought. This,
together with the bent of his character and his own convictions on the
necessity of a very mystical kind of religious life, effused itself in the peculiar spiritual character of the Pauline Commentaries of 1612.

Lefèvre's introduction to these Commentaries, dedicated to Briçonnet, stressed the mystical truths which one must realize in order to draw the full benefit from reading the Epistles of St. Paul. He argued that, in the orders of both nature and grace, everything comes from God, while the instruments He employs are nothing. Just as the earth can produce only thorns and thistles unless it receives rain from the sky, so too human intellects can furnish no nourishment to souls unless they have received divine life. Any production of the human intellect which proves fruitful to life and salvation is due not to the powers of the human artist but to the Divine Giver Himself. Lefèvre begged Briçonnet and all his readers to look not to Paul in the Epistles but to Christ, Who has showered graces upon His apostle. The same rule was to apply whenever signs of spiritual life and true nourishment for the soul were found in the Commentaries. Lefèvre cautioned that those who would attribute spiritual powers to the human artist, like Paul, and not to a superior power acting in and through him, would gain little fruit through their reading. Instead, they would become full of carnal sentiments and wrongly judge many points in Scripture, possibly even losing themselves in pure reverie and becoming evil in spirit.⁵⁵ Meditate rightly on these scriptural truths, Lefèvre counselled the Bishop who had served as his benefactor, and the grace of

⁵⁵ Cf. supra, 45-46, for Lefèvre's expression of this thought as early as 1498.
Christ, Who alone can give true happiness, will bring you the enjoyment of spiritual "allegresse" without limits.

Lefèvre anticipated that he would be considered rash for having added the sense of the Greek text to that of Jerome. He explained that such a criticism would be justified if it were true that he had changed Jerome. But this was never his intention. He sought rather to bring back into circulation an edition which had existed long before Jerome.56

Most important is not the introduction but the doctrinal view in the Commentaries, for Lefèvre showed here that he held to the inclusion of good works in the program of salvation. Luther would ground his whole system on justification by faith alone. Lefèvre, on the other hand, maintained a "via media." To gain the full view, one statement must be balanced against the other.

It is true that in one passage he states that it is almost profane to speak of the merit of works, and that to attribute merit to them is almost to have the opinion of those who believe we are justified by them, an error for which the Jews were condemned. We should not speak of the merit of our works, which is very little or almost nothing, but instead should celebrate the grace of God which is all. Lefèvre argued further that we can attribute merit only to Christ Who has merited all for us, and we must confess that we

ourselves have no merit before God but must simply hope in His grace.57

But we come most clearly to his position in the section where he
sought to conciliate Paul and James. Here his words are actually very clear.
He indicates that just the fact that a man has faith does not put him in a
permanent state of justification. Nor is one permanently justified without
faith and merely on the basis of good works. Both are necessary for the

57 "Dicimus apud Paulum qui gratiae dei tribuit omnia: ferme
prophanum esse loqui de merito operum, maxime erga deum. Nam proprioe meritum
non gratiam requirere videtur, sed debitum et meritum tribuere operibus:
prope modum cum eis est sentire, qui oredunt nos ex operibus justificari
posse, de quo errore damnantur Iudaei plurimum. Ergo meritum operum nostrorum,
quod vel perexiguum est, aut potius nullum, taceamus; et gratiam dei quae
totum est, magnificemus. Qui meritum defendit: hominem respicit qui gratiam
respicit deum....Quod siout hoc nomen et hoc modo proprioe tribuitur: maxime
Christo tribuitur qui nobis omnia est meritus, verum nos nichil erga deum
meritos confitentes, sed gratiam eius expectantes: ad rem revertamur, cum
Paulo afferentes opera ut opera, nichil nos deo commendare," Comm., 1 Cor.,
8, fol. 93-94. Doumergue holds that this emphasis on justification by faith
gives a reason for calling the Pauline Commentaries the first Protestant
book, for in it Lefèvre espoused "le grande doctrine protestante," "Paris
Protestant," BSHPF, XLV, 13-14; cf. his Jean Calvin, I, 82-83. Fernand
Mourret, S.S., interprets this statement in a manner unique for a Catholic
writer; he asserts that Lefèvre in these Commentaries "anticipated and equaled
the boldness of Luther and Zwingli," for he affirmed "unreservedly," not only
the exclusive authority of Scripture, but also salvation by faith and not
by good works, A History of the Catholic Church, trans. Newton Thompson,
justification for which they prepare and which God alone can bestow.58

Furthermore, Lefèvre states that works, which follow the faith, are the sign of a living faith, just as breath is the sign of our own life.59

Again, Lefèvre sought to show that a combination of faith and works is requisite even for the salvation of those who have never heard of Christ's truth. The unbelieving heathen, inhabitants of unknown lands where the Gospel has never penetrated, and even the ancients might be saved if they honor their parents, avoid injustice works, though natural virtues and repent transgressions against the natural law, and if they elevate their hearts toward the One they believe to be the Father of the world a type of faith. To believe this, Lefèvre held, is neither unworthy of the Divine Will nor contrary to apostolic teachings.60

Relevant here is Lefèvre's explanation of the meaning of works. They consist not only in the practice of the obligatory Christian virtues but also in works of penance. Furthermore, it is not enough to speak of penitence, but one must fast and make pilgrimages and indulge in such acts to


59 Ibid., Rom., 4, fol. 61.

60 Ibid., Rom., 2, fol. 57.
make himself suitable to Christ and not be excluded from His company. 61
But even in these mortifications one must not place the essence of his
salvation but instead only in the grace of Christ, for, even should he do all
these things, he would not do enough unless he would regard neither himself
nor his works but God alone. 62 Again there is the obvious effort at conciliation,
and the implicit denial of the Lutheran position.

The second vital point, in the evaluation of Lefèvre's dogmatic
opinions in 1512, is his doctrine on grace. The second cornerstone of Luther's
system would be his position on grace, giving a completely disastrous doctrine
on the effects of original sin and implying an internal degeneracy of the will
and even a kind of predestination. But, on this question, Lefèvre tried to
maintain his characteristic "via media." In one passage he disagreees with
the view that the will of man has an unfettered operation, 63 yet he never
says that its freedom was lost irrevocably through original sin. 64 He has
nothing comparable to Luther's views on concupiscence. 65 Nowhere does he
state that man is irresistibly drawn to sin and vice, as Luther would maintain.

61 Ibid., Heb., 6, fol. 191.
62 Ibid., Coloss., 3, fol. 145.
63 Ibid., Phil., 2, fol. 137.
64 Cf. ibid., Rom., 5, fol. 62-64, where Lefèvre scarcely sketches the
doctrine on original sin.

65 "Non itaque si quis ex vero et muliere sit conceptus: protinus
sit ut addictus sit peccato ut carnem habeat peccati, sed quos beneficium aut
omnia non praeventit aut non sanavit." Ibid., Rom., 7, fol. 67.
or that, for all practical purposes, he has no free will, or that it is inoperative since the fall. Further, Lefèvre holds that grace requires our free consent in his optimistic explanation of Paul's texts: "Ergo eujus vult miseretur et quem vult indurat," 66 and "Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri." 67

On the Mass, the central act of Catholic life and worship, Lefèvre maintains that the Masses offered daily are not so many reiterated sacrifices, but are the memory and remembrance of one and the same Victim, Jesus Christ, who, by offering Himself once, satisfied completely for all the sins of the world. 68


67 Ibid., 1 Tim., 2, fol. 159.

68 "Christus non pro prius peccatis (ut qui peccatum non fecit, nec inuentus est dolus in ore eius) sed pro totius mundi, una oblatione satisfecit, unus et vice una: potentior innumeris [sic], infinitas iteratis hostias. Ergo quae in ministerio sacerdotij eius quotidie peraguntur: non tam sunt iteratae oblationes, quam unius ejusdem, et quae semel tantum oblata est, victimae memoria et recordatio," ibid., Hebr., 7, fol. 193. Doumercq, seeing a Calvinist doctrine in this statement, believes that Lefèvre denied that the Mass is a real sacrifice when he insisted on Christ's complete satisfaction for all the sins of the world by His single sacrifice on Calvary, Jean Calvin, I, 83. Amann, on the other hand, remarks that those who would draw such a conclusion from Lefèvre's words ignore the most elementary principle of Catholic dogma, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," DTC, IX, 1, 143. According to the Catholic position, Jesus Christ is both the High Priest Who offers the sacrifice and the Victim Who is immolated, while the priest acts as His minister and representative. While Calvary was a bloody sacrifice, the Mass is an unbloody one. It is true that Christ offered Himself only once on the cross to redeem all the sins of the world, but, through the daily sacrifice of the Mass, the merits of His Passion are applied to souls.
Lefèvre's views on the Mass and the Holy Eucharist are intimately connected, for, if he believes in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, it logically follows that he holds to the truly sacrificial character of the Mass. His remarks about this sacrament, as far as the 1512 Commentaries are concerned, are very vague. He says that the virtue of holiness is requisite for the reception of the Eucharist, and in general his rather indefinite statements in themselves do not seem incompatible with the views of his Catholic contemporaries.

It is true that he seems most vague, if not compromising, in his discussion of the elements of the sacramental system. He nowhere mentions the number of sacraments, but he does treat Baptism. He says that the pouring of water in Baptism does not justify but is the sign of justification by faith in Christ, for sensible symbols are signs of spiritual things and of divine infusions. This does not appear contrary to Catholic belief, although it

69 In his 1518 treatise on the Magdalen, Lefèvre wrote: "Le Christ est partout, mais surtout il est présent à la messe," Mann, Erasme, 73.

70 Comm., Heb., 7, fol. 193; cf. ibid., 1 Cor., 11, fol. 97, and ibid., Tit., 1, fol. 171-172.

71 "Ablutio circa nos materialis aquae in baptismate non justificat: sed signum est justificationis ex fide Christi. sensibilia enim symbols: spiritualium rerum et divinarum infusionum sunt signa et illorum sensus est: harum vero fides est signum inquam est huiusmodi ablutio, justificationis ex fide Christi: ut et materialis circumcisionis signum justificationis ex fide Abrahamae," ibid., Rom., 4, fol. 61.
too is used to claim Lefèvre for Protestantism.

It is also important to consider some of his statements on the Church, especially in view of his emphasis on the interior and mystical aspects of religious life. Did he feel that the Church is a necessary intermediary between God and man? Did he believe that it contains the elements necessary for man to use on his road to salvation? He thought that catholicity was an attribute of the Church founded by Christ which was inherent in its very being. Whatever breaks the unity of the Church forms a sect or heresy. Thus, it seems to have held an important place in his system, entirely in accord with the mystical note which deplores sectarianism. He explicitly manifested his desire to maintain the integrity and the oneness of the Church in accordances with its very makeup as planned by God.

72 Mourret notes that these words of Lefèvre on Baptism taken literally would be Zwinglian, Catholic Church, V, 449-451, n. 19, while Doumergue interprets his statement to mean that the sacraments have no magical power and thinks that here he shook still another basis of Catholicism, Jean Calvin, I, 83. But can Lefèvre's words here be applied to all the sacraments, as Doumergue would hold? Further, this author speaks of the "ex opere operato" workings as magical powers. Catholic doctrine does not claim magical powers for the sacraments, and the Catholic position on Baptism is that mere pouring of water without a "sacramental intention" has no significance at all.

73 Comm., Ephes., 2, fol. 129; cf. ibid., 1 Cor., 1, fol. 84.

74 Ibid., Phil., 3, fol. 139.
In view of Lefèvre's own irresistible longing for the monastic habit, his observations on this state in his 1512 Commentaries are of interest. He thought that celibacy is superior to the married state because the unmarried man is of greater usefulness to the Church, and also because of the purity and freedom of spirit it allows. As Saints Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas counselled, those who live in convents should not be idle. Yet Lefèvre argued that men are able to serve Christ outside convents as well as in them. Just as St. Paul himself intimated, all persons are not able to lead a celibate life. Discreetly, Lefèvre mentioned that the Church's favoring of celibacy for religious has sometimes proven inconvenient. In fact, by permitting the clergy to marry until the time of Gregory VII, Lefèvre believed

75 Cf. Lefèvre's publication of Ruysbroeck's De Ornatu Spiritualium Nuptiarum in 1512 for evidence of his continuing love of the monastic life. Here he praised fleeing from the world, the renunciation of earthly goods, and the union of the soul with God, the end of the contemplative life. Few know this union, he reflected, for it must be accompanied by a divine visit. But he admitted that there was no religious who did not experience the sweetness of spirituality, especially in a monastery or convent where the rule was rigorously followed, Renaudet, Préréforme, 622, n. 1.

76 Comm., 1 Cor., 7, fol. 91-92.

77 Ibid., 1 Thess., 4, fol. 61.

78 Ibid., 1 Cor., 1, fol. 84.
that the Church maintained the more truly apostolic custom. 79

A few pointed comments seem pertinent in closing a discussion of Lefèvre's doctrinal views in his Pauline Commentaries. Almost paradoxically, it may prove somewhat misleading for a student of his religious thought to try to cull from this book, or his other Scriptural Commentaries, any of his views on the essential points of Catholic dogma. This is true because it was not his intention to comment upon dogma per se; rather, he intended to spiritualize doctrine and exalt its mystical value. In his statements on the sacraments, for example, it was not his purpose to make clear and lucid statements on their meaning in Catholic theology, on their operation or their efficacy. In trying to show that Scripture is the highest source of spiritual comfort, Lefèvre did not intend to suppress the traditional beliefs of the visible Church, of which he spoke respectfully in his Commentaries, but merely to steer away from formalistic religion.

Hyma takes Duemergue to task for labelling Lefèvre's position in

79 Ibid., 1 Tim., 3, fol. 160. These words of Lefèvre, including "Agamiam acceptaverunt alias ecclesias, unde plurimi, per detestarem insensibilium lapsi, in pediam insidierunt diaboli," to some extent express only historical fact. His views here in no way contradict the principle of Catholic clerical discipline as it evolved and certainly in no way touch dogma. Among his minor points for stating that the Pauline Commentaries was the first "Protestant" book, Duemergue lists this--Lefèvre reproved the clergy for their immorality, Jean Calvin, I, 84. The illegitimacy of drawing such a conclusion from Lefèvre's statement here seems obvious. Muret similarly interprets this statement; he says Lefèvre's insistence on the celibacy of the clergy indicates that in 1612 he seemed to align himself more with the Protestant than the Catholic side, Catholic Church, V, 449-461, n. 19.
1512 "Fabrisian Protestantism." In his answers to Doumergue's interpretations we find the link between Lefèvre's familiarity with the writings and traditions of the Brethren of the Common Life and some of his own views. Hyma's observations are vital, for they indicate in great measure why Lefèvre may not be called a Protestant, on the basis of this 1512 work at any rate.

We noted that, in the year after he returned from his visit to the Cologne Brethren, Lefèvre induced Badius Ascensius to print Mauburn's Rosetum, while he himself edited Ruysbroeck's *Spiritualium Nuptiarum* in 1512 and Cusa's works in 1514. In all three works, "Protestant" views like those of Lefèvre are expressed. He seems to have been influenced by them. Notably, they are akin to Lefèvre's own writings in their exaltation of faith and, as mystical productions, in their lack of any discussion of the theology of the sacraments or the organization of the Church. Probably, too, Lefèvre had read the works of Gansfort where a long list of quotations on justification by faith from the Epistle to the Romans is given. Both Renaudet and Hyma agree that Lefèvre's "Protestant" ideas sound so much like those in Gansfort's writings and in Thomas à Kempis' familiar *Imitation of Christ* that he may have received them during his Cologne visit. Indeed, many a sentence in the 1512 Commentaries seems to have been copied verbatim from the *Imitation*. In fact, for over a century, the Brethren had been trying to show that Paul and James do not

---

80 Cf. supra, 55-61.

81 *Préreformes*, 621-622.
disagree. It is significant that, two years after his close contacts with their history, Lefèvre himself attempted a similar task.

Doumergue lists as a reason for Lefèvre's "Protestantism" his disapproval of the Latin prayers of the liturgy and his desire that they be put into the vernacular for the benefit of the common people. Yet he says nothing of Lefèvre's reply to those who reproved him for having recommended the works of Ruysbroeck, who had written everything in the Flemish language. Lefèvre had referred them to his prized *Imitation*, asking if that wonderful book was written in the vernacular, why not the works of Ruysbroeck? And, as early as 1598, Zerbolt had written the *De libris teutonicalibus*, or *An liceat libros divinos transferre in vulgare*, which insists that laymen should read the Bible in the vernacular and say their prayers in their native tongue.

In general, on the "Protestantism" of Lefèvre's *Commentaries*, "not one single view" is expressed therein which cannot be found at least as plainly in the *Imitation* and Gansfort's writings. This seems an authentic position, backed up not only by a master of the literature and history of the followers of Groote, but also by their general aim to sow "the seeds of reform

---


83 Doumergue could not have seen Zerbolt's treatise because Hyma first discovered it at Nuremberg, *Christian Renaissance*, 424, n. 98.
and personal religion in the hearts of thousands."  

The question arises, did the Pauline Commentaries influence Luther? If Lefèvre did in any way influence the German heretic, it must have been either on the basis of the 1512 work or the Psalter of 1509, since, by the time of Lefèvre's next biblical Commentaries, 1522, Luther's own ideas had crystallized. It is certain that Luther used the Quincuplex Psalterium, for his copy is still extant with his notes scrawled in the margins. Preserved Smith holds that, from Lefèvre's Psalter, Luther borrowed his extremely complex method of interpreting Scripture in a double sense, half literal and half spiritual. But he was even more impressed by Lefèvre's 1512 work. He received a copy of it two or three years after it was published when it became the basis for his university lectures on the Romans. From it he also obtained what linguistic material he used until Erasmus' Greek New Testament appeared, when he temporarily abandoned Lefèvre for the more recent authority.

---

84 Ibid., 276-279.

85 Luther's familiarity with it can also be deduced from his statement that he does not know the meaning of "those" refrains, referring to the "Selah" which occurs in Psalm LXVII and elsewhere and which was not in the Vulgate but in the original version and so in the edition of Lefèvre which Luther used, Luther to Spalatin, (1514?), Luther's Correspondence, I, 31 and n. 2.

86 "Luther's Development of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Only," The Harvard Theological Review, VI, 1913, 413.

87 Ibid., 412.
Further, and most significant, Smith believes that Luther took the form of the doctrine of justification by faith bodily from Lefèvre for use as a formula in which to cast his own theology. He is careful to point out, however, that only the form belonged to the Frenchman since Luther's own personal experience led him to adopt this doctrine and to give it a new and deepened meaning.88

During these years, Luther did have some very definite ideas of his two mentors, Erasmus and Lefèvre. While profoundly interested in their literary quarrel,89 he was at the same time evaluating their religious views. Luther wrote that Erasmus displeases him when he considers the "righteousness of the law or works" to mean only ceremonies, instead of the whole decalogue, for no good done outside the faith of Christ savors of justification anymore "than apples do of figs." He requested Spalatin to inform Erasmus of his error for through his great authority some will be led to defend the literal, that is the killing sense of Scripture....For even Lefèvre d'Étapes a man otherwise, Heaven knows, spiritual and sincere, lacks this proper understanding of the Scriptures when he interprets them, although he has it abundantly in his own life and in exhorting others.90

Luther even cautioned John Lang of Erfurt not to read all of Erasmus' works without scrutiny, for his opinion of him becomes daily worse. Insofar as he

88 Ibid., 414. Cf. Villoslada, who agrees that Lefèvre's ideas on justification by faith probably had some influence on Luther, Universidad de Paris, 230.

89 Cf. supra, 40.

90 Luther to Spalatin, Wittenberg, October 19, 1516, Luther's Correspondence, I, 43-44.
boldly and learnedly convicts and condemns priests and monks of inveterate ignorance; he pleases Luther, but

Timæo ne Christum et gratiam Dei non satís pro-
moveat, in qua multo est quam Stapulensis ig-
noratior: humana praevalent in eo plus quam
divina. 91

The only point Luther, Erasmus, and Lefèvre had in common was a
dissatisfaction with the state of religious affairs, though certainly for
diverse reasons. This is evident from their publications—Luther's Ninety-
Five Theses on the cathedral door at Wittenberg, Lefèvre's Psalter and his
Pauline Commentaries, and Erasmus' works, among them his Praise of Folly of
While the plans of each for religious reform were not the same, more dissimilar
still were their methods of carrying their plans into effect. But their
contemporaries, about to be caught in the flaming cauldron of religious
controversy, could not easily perceive the differences of Erasmus, Lefèvre,
and particularly Luther.

91 Luther à Jean Lang, Wittenberg, 1 mars, 1517, Herminjard,
Correspondance, I, 27; cf. also Luther's Correspondence, I, 54–55.
CHAPTER IV

LEFEVRE D'ETAPLES AND THE "GROUP OF MEAUX"

In 1516 Briçonnet was appointed bishop of Meaux, but he spent the next two years at Rome, where he was dispatched by Francois I as a special envoy to treat with the Pope concerning the concordat then under consideration. Briçonnet's direct contact with Leo X and the cardinals and his intimate acquaintance with conditions at the papal court, which he had first observed on an earlier mission under Louis XII, may have deepened his realization that the Church was acutely in need of reform. Probably he resolved to begin the ground work in his new diocese in the hope that reform would eventually spread to the other dioceses in the French realm. At Meaux he found a vast field of action to continue, though on a larger scale, the system he had placed in operation earlier at Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It may also have been that he submitted these plans to the Roman authorities. In any case, upon his return in 1518, real reformist activity commenced at Meaux.

Briçonnet felt it was his duty as a bishop to undertake religious reform in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel. He realized the sacred character of the episcopal office:

Le ministère épiscopal...est tout évangélique.
L'évêque est un ange envoyé par le Christ, chargé de son message, et qui accomplit l'office des anges, de purger, d'illuminer, de rendre parfaites
les ames. 1

Yet, part of the Gallican system becoming more important in the French Church during this period, the bishop of Meaux realized that reformist efforts in the individual dioceses could be successful only if the King would cooperate. In fact, Toussaints Du Plessis says that Briçonnet wished to reform his diocese "pour suivre les vues du roi." 2 He even urged Marguerite d'Angoulême to use all her influence with the king, her brother, so that in the future he would choose only bishops worthy of the tasks they are called to fulfill. Although he commended Francis for having already appointed many worthy men, he lamented that "la maladie incurable" is that each one is not a "vray ministre de l'Espoux." 3 He also intimated to the Duchess that both he and his fellow-bishops needed to be reawakened to their duties. 4

Briçonnet deplored not only the lackadaisical attitude of many of the bishops but also the ignorance of Christian doctrine of both clergy and laity. He recognized the lack of spiritual enthusiasm in many of the clerics who were "l'estat par la froideur duquel tous les aultres sont gallass. " 5

---


3 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, St. Germain (des-Prés), 31 janvier, (1524), Herminjard. Correspondance, I, 187; cf. also the letter of 25 février, 1524, ibid., 201.

4 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, (St. Germain-des-Prés?, 12 février, 1524), ibid., 190.

5 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, Meaux, 22 décembre, 1521, ibid., 86; cf. Pierre Jourda, Correspondance de Marguerite d'Angoulême, Paris, 1930, 13. Cf. the simile Cliquot used when he remarked that there was such profound ignorance in the Church that only a small number of clerics could comprehend completely the meaning of what they read and chanted, and, among both clergy and laity, there were "dry hearts and souls cold as glass," Josse Cliquot à l'éveque Gosthon, Paris, 1515. Herminjard. Correspondance, I, 21.
Probably Brigonnet is alluded to in a small book printed at Paris in 1624, where it recounts that a faithful bishop witnessed the sad situation that neither vicars nor their flocks knew the Our Father, the symbols of the apostles or even the Decalogue. Crying out "O nous maleureux," he blamed both himself and his predecessors for not having carried out the tasks entrusted to them, and prayed that Christ would shower His abundant grace on all ecclesiastics so that they would diligently care for the spiritual welfare of their people.6

Brigonnet was not only vaguely theoretical when he spoke of the need of reform in the French Church, but he was determined to put it into practical effect, and he did. Unlike many of the Gallican bishops who resided in the entourage of the king, he lived in the midst of his flock, visited his diocese annually,7 and called regular synods. The visitations were particularly important for the only clerics who travelled through his diocese were the Cordeliers, Franciscan friars, and many of them put too heavy a stress on the privileges of their Order and the miracles of their saints.8 To remedy this situation, Brigonnet divided his two hundred parishes into twenty-six stations and in each appointed a preacher, especially during Advent and Lent. As a measure against absenteeism, he appointed another, besides a priest, to live

---


7 Lefèvre made a point of indicating that the bishop of Meaux actually visits his diocese, Le Fèvre d'Etaples à Beatus Rhenanus, Paris, 9 avril, (1619), ibid., I, 43.

8 Imbert de la Tour, Origines, III, 112.
in the midst of his charges. He allowed the Cordeliers to keep and preach in only two groups of parishes and even tried to prevent the people from frequenting these by preaching in the Meaux cathedral himself. Briçonnet forbade the Franciscans to represent St. Francis stigmatized even in their own churches. On October 15, 1619, he issued his first synodal decree obliging priests to reside in their parishes, repeating this ordinance on October 7 and 27, 1620. On August 11, 1620, he forbade dances and public games on Sundays and feast days because of the scandal which might be caused, reminding his people that God had created such days of rest for them to recall His

9 Du Plessis, Église de Meaux, I, 331, cited in Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 67-68, n. 4. Lermite, Briçonnet’s secretary, in 1623 praised his bishop’s invincible patience in tolerating the insolences and rebellions of the Cordeliers, for most of his troubles ensued as a result of his prohibition of their preaching, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 157, n. 2. Note that the Parlement of Paris, as late as June 1, 1625, sustained Briçonnet’s authority by prohibiting the monks from preaching in Meaux, whether in the morning or evening, and when either the bishop himself was preaching or had a preacher, before him. Reg. du Parlement preuves des libertez de l’Église gallicane, IV, 102, cited in Baird, Huguenots, I, 180, n. 2. A royal edict caused those who refused to obey to be brought before the Parlement. This enabled the bishop to continue his issuance of censures and decrees, his preaching of sermons and his undertaking of all his reform procedures in the face of the most flagrant opposition. Such governmental favor toward Briçonnet’s plans may have been due to Marguerite’s intercession for him; she informed him that he could count on her protection at the Court, and she hoped that, if “les pères” [the Meaux Cordeliers] came, they would be answered according to Briçonnet’s counsel. Marguerite d’Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Bourgogne, après 19 juin, 1621, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 67-68. An apostolic rescript, moreover, forbade any preachers for collections in the diocese of Meaux to publish there any indulgences without the permission of the Ordinary, Imbert de la Tour, Origines, III, 113-114.
innumerable benefits, become contrite, and beseech His grace. These constituted the substance of the earliest reforms at Meaux.

Soon Briçonnet became aware that he would need help in executing his grandiose plans, and called to his diocese those whose works, ideas, or renown had shown them to be genuinely interested in the spirit of the Gospel, which he desired to make the basis of the spiritual life of Meaux. In July, 1521, Lefèvre left Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and the following August received control of the leprosarium at Meaux; in May, 1523, he became vicar-general of the diocese. Among other newcomers were the eloquent Gérard Roussel, a mystically inclined priest of Busancé, to whom Briçonnet entrusted the parish of Saint-Saintin and later the treasury of the cathedral chapter, and François Vatable, the famed Hellenist, who was appointed the parish priest of Saint-Germain-Couilly and Quincy and canon of Saint-Étienne. Michel d'Arande, a priest educated at Paris, arrived at Meaux in 1521, though in June of that


11 The fact that some of these men were humanists may be the reason for Mourret's remark that the "seed of French Protestantism" was planted in a "peaceful, friendly meeting of literary men under the patronage of a bishop," Catholic Church, V, 438.

12 Crevier thinks that Lefèvre retired to Meaux because he did not want to acquiesce in the censure of the faculty of theology against him for several propositions extracted from his 1523 Exposition sur les Évangiles, Université de Paris, V, 202, but it would appear that Crevier has set the date of Lefèvre's exit from Saint-Germain two years too late. One of his own disciples told Zwingli that Lefèvre had gone twenty miles out of the city because he could not bear to listen to the constant abuse of Luther, though, of course, the "oaken theologian" (Quercus, cf. infra, 117, n. 2,) spared neither Lefèvre nor Erasmus, Clareamus à Zwingli, Paris, 4 juillet, 1521, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 71; cf. Luther's Correspondence, II, 43-44.
year, he entered the services of Marguerite.\textsuperscript{13} Two noted theologians also came, Martial Mazurier,\textsuperscript{14} since 1609 a doctor of theology and principal of the college of Saint-Michel de Paris, who at Meaux was a priest in the church of Saint Martin, and Pierre Caroli, a canon of Sens. Mazurier and Caroli were the most outwardly enthusiastic and zealous preachers of the Gospel at Meaux, especially the latter who early adhered to the most striking innovations.\textsuperscript{15} Guillaume Farel did make lengthy visits to this diocese, but he was not a permanent member of Briçonnet's group.\textsuperscript{16}

Lefèvre was to prove particularly helpful to his bishop in providing material for carrying out the reforms more effectively. We noted that, from the beginning, Briçonnet was aware that many of the clergy lacked real theological preparation, and thus they could not successfully inform others of Christian truths. In a major way, then, Briçonnet's preaching reforms depended upon a more firm knowledge of Catholic beliefs on the part of his priests and preachers. He was aware that Lefèvre's French editions of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Haag says Arande was obliged to flee to Meaux because of his "Lutheran" opinions, \textit{France protestante}, I, 299.
\item[14] The editors of Theodore of Beza's \textit{Histoire ecclésiastique} hold that Beza is wrong in stating that Mazurier was called to Meaux at the same time as Lefèvre. They think that Mazurier arrived at the end of 1623 when Briçonnet began to fear the character of the Roman Church's opposition and the accusation of Lutheranism raised against him by the Sorbonne and Parlement. Then, he had others come, less suspect of heresy but likewise belonging to the school of Lefèvre, I, 12.
\end{footnotes}
Epistles and Gospels would help to assuage the ignorance of the Meaux clerics. In 1524 the bishop enjoined them, in the absence of preachers, to read from the Scripture daily and at their discretion to add words of exhortation. He commissioned Roussel to read the Pauline Epistles and explain their meaning every morning to a gathering of the faithful. He also commissioned the "lectores puriores," the most evangelical of the preachers, to perform a similar duty in all the more important spots in the diocese.17 About the same time, Brignonnet placed into the hands of his clergy a small book of instructions on the Epistles and Gospels for all the Sundays of the liturgical year.18 The grounds for attributing this work to Lefèvre are the similarity of content and style to that of his other works, and his close workings with the Brignonnetian reforms.19

17 Le Fèvre d'Étaples à Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 6 juillet, 1524, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 220 and 221, n. 11. There is no precise information on the four "lectores puriores" whose names we know, Joanne Gadone, Nicolaio Mangino, Nicolaio a Novo Castro, and Joanne Meunillio, ibid., 222 and nn. 16-17.

18 Les Épistres et Évangiles des cinquante et deux dimanches de l'an avecques briefes et très utiles expositions d'yocelles à l'usage du diocèse de Meaux, / Médis, 1524 /

19 While Amann does not say definitely that Lefèvre was the author of this work, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," DTC, IX, 1, 147, there seems to be no doubt in the minds of Jourdan and Graf. Jourdan, who otherwise staunchly maintains the orthodoxy of the Meaux reform, states regarding Les Épistres et Évangiles that there can be "no doubt" of Dr. Graf's correctness in holding that this book exhibits "a distinct inclination towards Lutheran ideas, and contains harsher allusions to opponents than any other work of his," Catholic Reform, 279; cf. Graf, "Faber Stapulensis," ZHT, XXII, 78-79. It is true that the Sorbonne on November 6, 1525, condemned forty-eight of its statements, terming the majority of them "diabolica inventa et haereticorum figmenta," cf. infra, 134-135.
Although an active man, competent in handling the administrative matters which necessarily were connected with the inauguration of a grandiose reform plan in an important French diocese, Briçonnet was not less a "man of mysticism." For several years he, like Lefèvre, had a close familiarity with the writings of Nicholas of Cusa. Lefranco even adduces their admiration for the Cusan as a significant reason for their friendship.  

Besides, whatever mystical tendencies Briçonnet possessed must have ripened under his long and intimate acquaintance with Lefèvre, for it was during these years, as we have noted, that the latter was slowly saturating himself with pagan Platonic and Christianized Neoplatonic thought and medieval mysticism. Briçonnet's mysticism, closely allied with his evangelism, as was the case with Lefèvre, thus became somewhat of a principle of action in his life. It served as a basis for his practical reforms: that is, Briçonnet more and more became a convinced apostle against intellectualism, feeling that it is of principal importance for one's spiritual development to know God through "charitas."

These ideas of self-sacrifice and self-annihilation for the love of God were expressed in a small fourteenth-century tract, discovered by Lefèvre, "Les contemplations faites à l'honneur et louange de la très sacrée Vierge," which Briçonnet translated and published in 1519.

It is especially through his correspondence with Marguerite, as her

20 "Marguerite de Navarre," Bibl. de l'école des chartes, LVIII, 270.

21 Imbert de la Tour, Origines, III, 111.
spiritual director, that we gain an insight into his mystical nature and his intimate dependence upon other members of the Meeaux "group." The Duchess once confided to the bishop that the "least word of Scripture is too much" for her, while the "most clear is obscure." He admitted that he was in no position to explain these difficult passages to her, nor always to discover the spiritual as opposed to the literal sense, but for this he had recourse to three persons, Lefèvre, Roussel, and Vatable, who knew Hebrew and Greek and could correct faulty interpretations of Scripture. Briçonnet here showed that he, like the Christian humanists, realized the intimate connection between critical work with the sacred manuscripts, to restore accurate biblical texts, and Scriptural interpretation, to discover the hidden spiritual sense. Like Lefèvre, he thought that:

L'intelligence littérale est comme la chandelle qui ne couste que ung denier, dont on sershe la marguerite qui est cachee en la maison. L'intelligence spirituelle est la marguerite cachee, laquelle, par la lettre qui est la chandelle, se trouve, que l'on laisse, la marguerite trouvée,

22 A full vocabulary of Neoplatonic mysticism can be culled from this 1521-1524 correspondence. It abounds in phrases like "oeste douce et ravissante parole de vie," Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, (Sloisî, avant 16 janvier, 1523), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 109, and, more frequently, "le tout," "le seul nécessaire," and "la seule bonté," Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Bourgogne, après 19 juin, 1521, ibid., 67 and n. 3.

23 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, Meeaux, 16 janvier, (1523), ibid., 110 and n. 4-111.
laquelle ne se communique à chacun, et n'en congoissent la valeur et excellence.24

Briçonnet's ideal of reform seemed to be a spiritualization of religious life through a mild mystical evangelism. Through this, he believed, would come the peace which God alone could give:

Et seres esbahis que la lumière de paix vous viendra dont ne l'attendez, que n'aurez jamais des hommes ne de vos inventions, s'il ne se donne luy-mesme.25

Even an avowed Protestant like Weiss testifies that the bishop of Meaux desired to effect reform through clear and simple Scriptural instructions in the vernacular to his people "sans toucher aux sacrements, aux ceremonies et aux usages reçus."26 There are two extant versions of Briçonnet's exhortation to

24 Ibid., 110. These words well express not only Briçonnet's feeling but also that of the whole conclave of Meaux, and "démontrant précisément, et d'une façon indubitable, que la même évolution intellectuelle qui s'était produite précédemment chez les platoniciens de Florence s'accomplit également dans ce docte milieu. Les précurseurs de la Réforme et de la Renaissance en France, puisqu'au début les deux mouvements s'y conforment, appartenaient à un groupe que les théories néo-platoniciennes et mystiques avaient sérieusement pénétré," Lefrançois, "Marguerite de Navarre," Bibl. de l'école des chartes, LVIII, 268.

25 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, 'St. Germain-des-Prés?, 12 février, 1524), Hermann, Correspondance, 1, 190.

26 "La réforme du XVIe siècle, son caractère, ses origines et ses premières manifestations jusqu'en 1523," ESHPF, LXVI, 1917, 225. Cf. The Cambridge Modern History, which states that the sole desire of Briçonnet was the reform of the Church from within and that he had no sympathy with Luther's attitude of open revolt, II, 283. With this view the Protestants Haag acquiesce, adding that the bishop wanted only to purify and reanimate Catholic devotion, not to touch the hierarchy, France protestante, III, 128, 132.
his flock on the reforms he was advocating. Hesminjard says he cautioned them
never to receive any doctrines other than those he presently preached, even
should he himself or an angel from heaven bid them to do so.27 Antoine
Froment, the earliest Protestant chronicler, recounts Briconnet's words,
"Even should I, your bishop, change my speech and teaching, beware that you
change not with me."28 Baird, who holds that Briconnet's reforms from first
to last were of a distinctly Protestant character, interprets his words as a
significant warning by the bishop to his flock, "elicited either by the
consciousness of his own moral feebleness, or by a certain vague premonition of
danger."29 But another interpretation could be advanced if the Meaux reforms
were non-deviations from orthodox Catholicism: should Briconnet ever espouse
the radical cause of separation from Rome, his flock should not follow his
example.

Just as contemporaries looked at the bishop's actions from a Catholic
or Protestant point of view, depending on their religious allegiance, so they
interpreted the actions of Lefèvre. Various shades of reformism could hardly
be distinguishable to those who felt all reform would culminate in the same
disastrous effects. Particularly was this true after the Pope excommunicated
Luther. In September, 1520, Erasmus regretted that one of the monks preaching
against Luther in accordance with the bull, with a "black heart and stupid,

27 Correspondance, I, 188.
28 Baird, Huguenots, I, 77.
29 Ibid.
furious, and morose," spoke even more vehemently against Lefèvre than against Luther, while he even joined Erasmus with Lefèvre and Luther. When it was pointed out to this monk that these three all differed, he retorted that "heretics never agreed."30 Six months later, Erasmus related that a Carmelite preaching before the French king had termed "some Franciscan or other" in Italy, Lefèvre d'Étaples in France, Reuchlin in Germany, and Erasmus in Brabant "harbingers" of the Antichrist, Luther, who had already arrived.31 By the following March, certain Domicans of Savoy promoted Erasmus, Reuchlin, and Lefèvre to the ranks of Antichrists with Luther.32

While the enthusiastic actions or minor liturgical innovations of some of his colleagues at Meaux may have occasioned a false analysis of the character of his own work, Lefèvre had a peculiar role in the reform of the diocese. It was very much in accord, however, with his character, training, and experience: again, he was the scholar probing the depths of Scriptural meaning.

Sometime before April 20, 1522, he issued his Commentarii Initiatorii in quatuor Evangelia. In the preface, Lefèvre gives his views on the authority of the Gospel and its universality and the duties of the Pope, defines the true Christian, and explains the connection between literary humanism and

30 Erasmus to Francis Chiregatto, Louvain, September 13, 1520, Luther's Correspondence, I, 357.
31 Erasmus to Alexander, secretary of the count of Nassau, Louvain, March 13, 1521, ibid., 494 and n. 1; cf. also Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 64.
32 Un Moine à P. Claude Dieudonne à H.-C Agrippa, Anneoy, 10 septembre, 1521, ibid., 72.
religious reform. Only those, he feels, who love Jesus Christ and His Word with a perfect purity are true Christians. God desires that all men know evangelic truth and attain salvation, for the Gospel belongs to "every nation, every people, and every tongue." All kings, princes, and faithful must know the Gospel, follow it, and favor nothing but its advancement. No creature can add anything to it:

Tout ce qui ne réfléchit pas l'élat de la Parole, non-seulement n'est pas nécessaire, mais est absolument superflu....Que tous tiennent ferme ce qu'ont tenu nos ancêtres, et l'église primitive rougie du sang des martyrs: c'est que ne rien savoir en dehors de l'Evangile, c'est savoir tout.

The Sovereign Pontiff, above all others, must resemble the angel described in the Apocalypse, flying through the sky, carrying the Gospel to all peoples. Thus, in Lefèvre's design, the Pope remained the visible head of Christ's Church and played an all-important role.

Closely linked with Lefèvre's evangelism here are his Platonic and mystical tendencies. He says that this angel who must never cease to proclaim the Gospel, "le vrai culte de Dieu," directs men's thoughts toward "celui de l'Être unique," and adds:

Le seul culte pur est celui de l'Être unique; le culte rendu aux autres ne saurait être pur.... c'est en lui Seul que nous êtions laissé l'es- perance d'arriver à la vie éternelle.

So sacred and majestic is the Gospel and so far above man's intellect that none can comprehend it. A marked fideism is evident in Lefèvre's statement that man must believe what he himself cannot understand. In fact, the only way man can understand evangelical truths is through the spirit of Christ Who
abides in the believer.

Christ, le chef et le dispensateur de la vie éternelle, ne propose point son Évangile pour qu'on le comprenne, mais pour qu'on le croie.

L'Évangile, en effet, contient tant de choses qui dépassent, je ne dis pas la portée de notre intelligence, mais celle de toute intelligence créée qui n'est pas unie par essence à la Divinité....La foi néanmoins doit avoir la première place, l'intelligence, la seconde, car celui qui ne croit que ce qu'il comprend, ne croit pas encore d'une croyance bonne et suffisante.

Just as the human eye, blinded by the light of the sun, does not deny its existence, so also the intellect, blinded by the great and divine truths, must believe in them though it cannot realize them. Actually, Lefèvre exalted faith above reason:

Dans l'esprit la foi est plus élevée que l'intelligence puisque l'une saisit l'infini, et l'autre, le fini.

Lefèvre, optimistically desiring that "notre siècle" be brought to the likeness of the early Church, saw several advantages which could help to effect this. The first was the revival of ancient languages to use in restoring the text of Holy Writ; Greek was again made known to the West when Bessarion, Theodore Gaza, Emmanuel Chrysoloras, and George de Trebizond found asylum in Italy after Constantinople was captured by the Turks, while the study of Hebrew became important under Reuchlin. A second advantage conducive to the spread of the Gospel consisted in the discoveries of faraway lands, the Orient by the Portuguese, the Southwest by the Spaniards under a Genoese, and the Northwest by the French. That the name of Christ would be widely diffused in all these countries, Lefèvre ardently wished.
O Dieu que la tierre entière t’adore! (Ps. LXV)
Cui, qu’elle te rende un culte évangélique et
pur, un culte en esprit et en vérité! C’est
la ce qu’il faut avant tout désirer.

He thanked God that the Gospel had already found so many adherents in the
newly-discovered areas as had not been "depuis le temps de Constantin, ou
l’Église primitive peu à peu dégénérée perdit tout à fait son caractère." 33

Lefèvre explained how his own Commentaries fitted into this program
of announcing the Gospel. They were written under the guidance of God’s grace
and for His glory and to make known evangelic truths. They should help to
dissipate the darkness of man’s spirit and purify it so that it can receive
l’auguste sacrement de la lumière éternelle," and understand the spiritual
sense of Scripture. 34

In the 1522 Commentaries, like in those of 1512, Lefèvre’s major
purpose was to exalt the value of the “très-purs, très-lumineux, très-parfaits”
Gospels and not to explain biblical doctrines. But his general views on
dogma in 1522 did not differ appreciably, if at all, from those of 1512, nor
did his attitude toward the Church.

In 1522 Lefèvre continued to express his antagonism to any shattering

---

33 The Sorbonne in 1523 condemned this proposition as heretical;
Ch. Duplessis d’Argentre, Collectio Judiciorum de Novis Erroribus, qui ab
Initio Duodecimi Seculi post Incarnationem Verbi, usque ad annum 1632. In
Ecclesia proscripti sunt & notati, Paris, 1728, II, x.

34 Le Fèvre d’Étaples aux Lecteurs Chrétiens, Meaux, avant 20
avril, 1522, preface to the Commentarii initiatorii in quatuor Evangelia,
trans. from the Latin in Herminjard, Correspondance, 1, 89-97.
of the exterior order. He believed that Christ would send His angels to recall all schismatics into the "apostolic Jerusalem, universal and celestial. One might hold that Lefèvre here did not refer to the Church but meant rather the vague community of "true Christians" or "believers in the Gospel." But there can be no dispute regarding the meaning of his statement that those who wish to listen to Christ must receive His doctrine in the Church, "domus Petri." Lefèvre referred to the Pope as "janitor, pastor, vicarius Christi, qui ostium est, qui praest custodiam ecclesiae."

Because Lefèvre's intention was not to discuss theological questions in his Commentaries, he made few references to the sacraments, but his remarks are valuable nevertheless. He asks how one's sins can be forgiven if they are not known and how can they be known if not confessed? When the Lord spoke of forgiveness, He intimated the necessity of confessing one's sins. Although God is able to forgive a mortal sin, when one prays to Him for pardon, this alone will not suffice. A person must confess his sins according to "the ordinance of the Church which is also the ordinance of God." Thus, the confession of sins is of divine right—"ergo peccatorum manifestatio juris

---


36 Ibid., Matth., 13, fol. 53.

37 Ibid., Maro., 1, fol. 118.

38 Ibid., Maro., 13, fol. 151.
divini." But here Lefèvre speaks of the sacrament of Penance as one among other symbolic evidences of justification—"sacramentum reconciliatationis et alias symbolicas justificationis." 40

Apparently, Lefèvre distinguished between the forgiveness of sin and the temporal punishment due to sin which still remains. He seemed to realize the need for purgatory where the soul would be purified before it could reach heaven. He interpreted two passages of Scripture to mean that purgatory does exist—"reus erit gehennae ignis" 41 and "crucior in hac flamma" in the parable of the wicked rich man. 42 By these two passages, he felt that the traditional doctrine of the Church was supported. Lefèvre also plainly recognized that there is a hell for unrepentent sinners. 43

Nor does Lefèvre seem to have separated himself from the Church's views of the Eucharist. It seems that he recognized that there is a difference

39 Cf. Lefèvre's words a few years later in his Commentary on the Epistles, relative to James, 5, 16, after he mentions the practice of the early faithful of mutually confessing their wrongs: "Nunc autem remissa fide aut prorsus in plurimis extincta, quam Christus Jesus per suum verbum et suum spiritum suscitat, est alius confessionis peccatorum modus, quem etiam sua misericordia acceptat, et parum nunc fit aut quod hic Jacobus monet, aut quod Christus ipsa praecepit," cited in Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," DTC, IX, 1, 143.


41 Ibid., Matth., 5, fol. 21.

42 Ibid., Luc., 16, fol. 227.

43 Ibid., Matth., 10, fol. 41: "Deus, et corpus et animam mittere potest in aeternum gehennae cruciatum: et hoc est corpus et animam occidere, quod evenit in malis."
between Christ's presence in the Eucharist and elsewhere. In one passage he affirms that Christ is present where he desires, but his most significant words, that the earthly bread suddenly becomes heavenly, actually seem to indicate that he held to the Church's doctrine on transubstantiation and the Real Presence. In accordance with his spiritualizing ambitions, Lefèvre placed great stress on the necessity of the faith of the communicant and on the interior dispositions which could render the sacrament most efficacious for his spiritual well-being. He says that the only person who truly receives the Body and Blood of Christ is the one who, by perfect faith, already has Him spiritually in his soul.

To complete the outline of Lefèvre's sacramental views, let us note his words on Extreme Unction in his 1525 Commentarii in Epistolae catholicae. Relative to James 5, 14, Lefèvre wrote of the anointing of the sick by the presbyters of the Church, a practice which James encouraged. The apostle wrote that the "seniores ecclesiae" preached penance, cast out devils, and oiled the sick, and they were cured by it. Lefèvre thought that, in the time of James, when the fervor of the faith and true devotion existed, such cures

---

44 Ibid., Matth., 26, fol. 103: "Totum enim extra tuno erat sensibiliter et passibiliter: et totum intra sacramentaliter et impassibilibet.


46 Ibid., id: "Pane ex terrae repente facto caelesti."

were really produced. But today, he argued, the sick show how feeble is their faith, for they do not call the priests to console them at the hour of their death and to confirm them against the attacks of the devil until it is almost too late. Lefèvre likewise criticized the priests of his day who, though they anointed the dying, did "nothing or almost nothing" of what James prescribed. Lefèvre seems somewhat compromising here, apparently intimating that the Extreme Unction of his day was not the same as that of the apostolic era.

Imbert de la Tour feels that the Meaux "group" veered from orthodoxy most on honoring the saints, and that they were indignant over the deviations which transformed the cult into pure utilitarianism or superstition. As for Lefèvre, we are certain from his actions that he did have devotion to the saints, at least earlier in his life. He also proved by his words his belief in the value of their intercessions before God. He did vehemently criticize excessive invocations of saints who were patrons of special fields for favors of a temporal nature, it is true. Those who request the saints to give them

48 Lefèvre here defined the "seniores ecclesiae" of his own day as "those who administer the sacraments and are called priests and who must be men full of spirit and faith, who announce in all purity the Word of God and the Gospel of salvation."

49 Commentarii in epistolas Catholicae, cited in Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," DTC, IX, 1, 145.

50 Origines, III, 150.

wheat create a new Ceres; or wine, a new Bacchus; a tranquil sea, a new
Neptune, Lefèvre noted, while he cautioned that more honor should not be placed
in the instruments of God than in God Himself.52 Lefèvre's stand, in this
light, would not appear unorthodox, but merely an attempt to correct abuses
in the veneration of the saints.

In 1522, as in 1512, Lefèvre proved that his views on free will,
justification, and grace were the antitheses of Luther's. While Lefèvre
believed that the human will had been weakened by the fall, he did not hold
man's total corruption or his inability to triumph over evil. He thought that
original sin was taken away by baptism, "the immaculate tunio of a new birth."
To him, the ideal of a Christian life was not to resign oneself to his con-
cupiscence but rather to try to conquer it. Lefèvre's view here too fitted
into his whole approach which was grounded in love; he argued that those who
have faith in Christ's Passion sin with difficulty, for the spirit of His love
guards them.53

Because man is essentially free to suppress the evil tendencies of
his fallen nature, he is able to work out his own salvation with the help of
God. As in the Pauline Commentaries of 1512, so in 1522 Lefèvre held that man
can perform good works. If they are done with proper intention, they call
down God's grace, become truly spiritual, and valuable for man's justification.
Since, in the degrees of the spiritual life, action precedes faith, man cannot

52 Ibid., Marc., 16, fol. 163; cf. ibid., Luc., 23, fol. 252.
53 Ibid., Luc., 24, fol. 253.
hope to attain a state of purity unless God first excites him to do so. But, Lefèvre argued, God will not refuse His grace to those who do good.\(^5^4\) Grace is a recompense for works done in imitation of Christ and for following His precepts, and the Son of God gives grace to every man according to His works. Again, Lefèvre emphasized that faith and works both prepare for justification while God alone can justify.\(^5^5\) Fundamentally, then, Lefèvre thought that man cannot be saved unless he is first drawn by Christ, but his eternal perdition depends on himself. He advanced no predestination, for he explicitly stated that God wishes all men to be saved and gives them all His grace.\(^5^6\)

In his definition of works in 1522, Lefèvre included not only the practice of the obligatory Christian virtues but especially works of penance.\(^5^7\)

\(^5^4\) "Gratia...quae est merces bonorum operum," ibid., Matth., 6, fol. 26; Cf. ibid., Marc., 9, fol. 139, for the statement "Gratia dabitur bona facientibus." Cf. also ibid., Matth., 19, fol. 75. On the preparatory value of works, cf. ibid., Ioanne., 3, fol. 273; "Qui ergo bona facit, venit ad lucem veram quae est CHRISTUS."

\(^5^5\) "Justitia eius: justitia novae legis. Et haece duplex quaedam operum: quam imitando CHRISTUM et mandata eius impondo, assequimur. Altera fidei: qua a deo justificamur et haece justitia, gratiae est," ibid., Matth., 6, fol. 29. Cf. also ibid., Luc., 14, fol. 221, and ibid., Ioanne., 6, fol. 283.

\(^5^6\) "Nam omnes (tam ta est eius bonitas) vult salves fieri: et omnibus suam dat gratiam, tum ut salvet tum ut salventur," ibid., Ioanne., 6, fol. 290.

\(^5^7\) "Et qui non accipit cruxem suam et sequitur me: non est me signum...Crux: tribulation, persecutio, fames, angustia, suitipius mortificatio, contemptus, abnegatio, propter CHRISTUM, eius patientiam imitando," ibid., Matth., 10, fol. 48.
But, in his exaltation of faith in Christ, he indicated the insignificance of man's works compared to those of Christ.\textsuperscript{58} Although he recognised how important penitential works were in mortifying a Christian's flesh to "free his spirit," he inveighed against the excessive and almost pharisaic role they played in the lives of many Christians. He said that works are "human traditions," which nevertheless must be accepted when they are imposed by the proper authorities—"nihilominus sum impositas sunt ab iis qui autorex-
tatem habent, ferendae sunt."\textsuperscript{59} Though a vibrant interior religious life was more vital to Lefèvre than the sole concern with outward ascetical practices, he did not deny their necessity.

The mystical doctrine of Lefèvre is laid out most clearly in his Commentaries on the Gospels. To live is to be united to God; this is the whole meaning of Christianity, he says, but this state of unity cannot be reached suddenly but only by degrees. He explains that being climbs from the imperfect to the perfect, and from the carnal to the spiritual. Man's possession of God is an ascension towards Him, occurring at three different stages of spiritual growth—purgation, illumination, and finally perfection.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} "Salus tua miser, non sunt opera tua; sed opera CHRISTI. Tu te saluare non potes; sed CHRISTUS. Tua crux non te salubrit; sed crux CHRISTI," \textit{ibid.}, Matth., 10, fol. 43.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, Matth., 23, fol. 87.

Man can learn of God through action, the practice of God's law, and contemplation, meditation of His truth. The very premises of this interior purification are the love of good works, charity, and prayer. Lefèvre, recognising the importance of humility, says that a purified heart is first of all a humble heart. Not only is man unable to know himself without this virtue, but certainly he is unable to know God. Neither can man, without humility, ever love perfectly, nor can he raise himself to the highest joy of union with God. Action is good and useful in purifying one's soul, Lefèvre indicated, but contemplation is even more valuable. Though man can find God in churches and spiritual reading and even through contact with holy persons, Lefèvre knew how important it was to seek Him in peaceful meditation. Meditation on the truths of the Gospel is essential, since certainty can be found there alone. Neither "traditions" nor "human opinions" can teach us the word of Jesus, for they are but "the daughters of men" and so can bring forth only the work of men, such as "sects" and disputes.

Converging into a very close unity in these statements are Lefèvre's evangelism and mysticism. He says that the Gospel is more than
"a rule" or "the law of the Father," it is the very "life of Christ," but, unless one is united to Christ, he cannot find Him there. And one becomes united to Him through love. In fact, God is most pleased with those who come to faith through love. Lefèvre defines faith as "an interior work, the gift of God, the descent of the Eternal on our souls" but especially as "a great illumination." By this gift the Spirit creates in us a new being.

When the purified soul becomes illuminated, it not only assents to the truth, but also it has absolute confidence and perfect hope. Most significant is Lefèvre's explanation of the relationship between the Gospel and the Church. The Church can preach Jesus to us, he says, but it cannot create for us an intimate union with Him. We do not say that we would not believe in the Gospel if we did not believe in the Church, but rather that we are convinced of the Gospel only through Christ; thus, it is the Gospel which leads us to the Church.

In the third and final step in man's spiritual progress, perfection, the soul is delivered from all bonds of attachment to the material world, and it thinks of and desires nothing but the Infinite, by Which it knows itself.

63 "Vix potest aliquis in Christo manere nisi verba Christi in ipso maneat," ibid., Ioann., 15, fol. 342; cf. also ibid., Luc., 14, fol. 220-221.

64 "Perro vera de deo fides magna illuminatio est at infidelitatis pessatum, quod est privato illius: magna oaseitas," ibid., Ioann., 9, fol. 309.

65 Ibid., Ioann., 4, fol. 278-279.
loved. The life of the human soul is absorbed into God's life, Lefèvre holds, and it becomes one with Him as "the Father and the Son are one."66

Much of what is found in Lefèvre on the uselessness of subtle disputes, the nothingness of man's works in themselves, appeals to the life of grace, and the infinite goodness of God are echoes of a mystical tradition inspired by Christianized Neoplatonism. Yet Lefèvre spoke vehemently against such a unity of the Platonic tradition with Christianity: "we follow Christianity and not Platonism." He added that, if the old law is not to be confounded with the new, how much more should we avoid mixing "profane things with divine things!"67

Evidently Lefèvre did not realize how the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Christian mystical traditions converged in him. There is at least an interior imprint of the Pseudo-Dionysius in Lefèvre's very expressions. We know that he was imbued with Dionysius' thought, and it seems that he may have obtained from the Areopagite some of his most basic mystical ideas—for example


67 "Nam Christiana prossequimur: non Platonica...si etiam lex vetus non est miscenda novae, nec intelligentia secundum letteram intelligentiae spiritus et gratiae quanto minus gentilitia divinas?," ibid., Ioann., 1, fol. 281.
his notions of the Sovereign Good, or of God and the soul's union with Him which we have just noted. Imbert de la Tour would even add that the very master idea of Lefèvre's mystical doctrine, the hierarchy of beings and degrees of the spiritual life, was taken primarily from Dionysius.

Obviously, then, neither the speculative nor the moral mysticism of Lefèvre was completely original. But by the very fact that it was connected with the Gospel, it posed also the essential problems which evangelism itself had raised. With its stress on the authority of Scripture and on the necessity of faith for salvation, it was in rather close relations with the doctrines of the Revolt.

The basis of the pre-reform period was evangelistic. The view was repeatedly advanced that all persons, and not a chosen few, were to read the Word of God. On June 8, 1523, Lefèvre issued his first French version of the Gospels. The exhortation at the head read: "Christus dixit:

---

68 Lefèvre wrote: "Charitas enim: est asymulato divinae bonitatis: nam nihil amabile est: nihil bonum, nihil vere amabile: nihil verum bonum, nihil summe amabile: nihil summum bonum et ab hae maxime perfecti esse possimus: quodammodo pater nostre coelestis perfectus est quia summa in eo bonitas: idem est quod sumus amor, summa charitas, summa dilectio. Sic enim deus...," ibid., Matth., 5, fol. 24. Cf. the God of Dionysius described in his De divinis nominibus, where God is the Thought one cannot think, the Word beyond every word, the Life of all that is living, but, most of all, the Supreme Goodness, the Creator and Conserver of all things.

69 Origines, III, 141-142.
Praecipue evangelium omni creaturarum. Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit." The time for the pure preaching of God's Word had arrived. Lefèvre cried with joy, for now even the simple people who could not read Latin would be able to be "as certain of evangelic truth" as those who read the Latin. He anticipated two objections which would be made as a result of his vernacular translation. To the first, that it is worth more to read the Gospels in Latin before they are translated, adjusted or diminished, he answered that he had not paraphrased the Scriptural text while translating it, for he felt that was a very perilous thing to do. To the second, that the difficult and obscure points of Holy Writ could not be understood by the simple people, Lefèvre gave a threefold answer. He acutely observed that this same objection could have applied when the evangelists gave the Gospel to the Greeks and Latins. Furthermore, even learned men have fallen into error in interpreting Scripture, a proof that not only the simple people are apt to do so. Those who try to keep the common folk from reading Scripture by saying they would not be able to understand it disobey Christ's command to preach His Word to every creature. They are like the doctors of the law against whom Christ spoke, according to Luke, 11, and so they will have to answer before the judgment seat of God for attempting to keep His Word from His children.

In this first French translation of 1525, Lefèvre stated still more emphatically his view that Christ can be reached only through His words and not through men or their doctrines, that Light is to be found only in
the Holy Gospel, and that, when we live the Christ-life of the Gospel, our works are no longer works of darkness:

Et ce pour corriger les fautes de la Christianité, lesquelles sont mout grandes, se brief on ne se retourne a Luy, en delaisant toute autre folle fiance en creature quelconque, et toutes autres traditions humaines, lesquelles ne peuvent sauver, et en suyvant la seule parole de Dieu qui est esperit et vie....Alors nous vivrons de son es- perit et de sa vie qui est tout, et non du nostre et de la nostre qui n'est rien. Laissons la chair, prenons l'espirit. Laissons la mort, prenons la vie. Laissons la miest, prenons le jour, sachans (comme dit saint Paul) que la miest est passée, et le jour est approché (Rom., 13), et que les ceuvres precedentes ont este ceuvres de temebres....Sachons que les hommes et leurs doctrines ne sont rien, sinon de autant que elles sont corroborées et confir- mées de la parole de Dieu.70

On November 6, 1525, when the second part of Lefèvre's translation of the New Testament issued from the presses of Simon de Colines at Paris, he reiterated his view that God desires all men to read the Bible. He re- called that, in the past, Charles VIII had had it translated into French.71 But Lefèvre was jubilant over the recent events which had led to his work.

70 /Le Fèvre d’Staples/, "Epistre exhortatoire à tous Chrétien et chrétienne," (8 juin, 1523), Traduction française des Évangiles, Hermingard, Correspondance, I, 182-188.

71 This French "translation" of the Bible occurred when Charles VIII was sixteen or seventeen years of age. The work of Jean de Rély, it was not a true translation but was actually a paraphrased biblical extract. Lefèvre's undertaking was the first real reproduction of the Vulgate text, without addition or subtraction, ibid., 150, n. 2.
He referred to the wish of Marguerite and Louise of Savoy for a new translation of Scripture to serve for their edification and consolation. He mentioned that Francis, a king as much Christian "in heart as in name," intended that the Gospel of Christ should be purely preached to both the learned and the simple persons in his kingdom. To the benefits ensuing from this royal favor toward evangelism, Lefèvre added those which would result if all priests, preachers, and theologians would urge the people to read and meditate on the Gospels. Characteristically optimistic, Lefèvre cried out: "Et bénissez soit l'heure, quant elles viendra!" 72

On February 17, 1525, Lefèvre issued his French translation of the Psalter. Some persons may have deduced from his continuing biblical translations that he intended to put the entire liturgy into the vulgar tongue, but he seems never to have entertained such an idea. It does not seem as if Lefèvre played any part in the actions of some of his Meaux colleagues who, timidly at first, spoke to the populace about translating the Creed and the Pater Noster into French. 73

In July, 1524, Lefèvre was exultant over the ardor with which God was moving the minds of the simple to embrace His Word since the New Testament had been translated into the vulgar tongue, but he knew that Farel

72 Le Fèvre d'Étapes à tous Chrétiens et Chrétiennes, Paris, (6 novembre, 1525), ibid., 159-169.

73 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étapes," DTC, IX, 1, 148.
would justly lament that they had not been scattered even more widely among the people.74 The biblical translations were popular indeed, particularly among the wool-carders and weavers of Meaux and the day-laborers who aided the Meaux farmers during the harvest season. Though many were too poor to buy copies, Briçonnet freely distributed copies, and introduced them into the churches.75

This appetite shown at Meaux for Bible reading made circumstances especially favorable for its spread. At Briçonnet's episcopal residence, the reform group was not deprived of reading German and Swiss literature. Several times it has been noted that all members of the Meaux "group" were not of precisely the same stamp; Farel, particularly, early adhered to the radical reform party and by 1523 left Meaux for Basel. Farel's exit from the diocese was not, however, a final breach between him and Lefèvre. Farel tried to keep the mystical scholar and the "group" as a whole abreast of religious events in Switzerland.76 Thus, little by little, Farel was successfully bringing the seneschal of Meaux into the orbit of the Swiss and

74 Le Fèvre d'Étapes à Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 6 juillet, 1524, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 227.

75 Briçonnet was reproached for this action at his trial, Berger, "Le procès de Briçonnet," BSHPF, XLIV, 7-22.

76 Late in 1525, Farel wrote that the progress of the Gospel in France was hindered not only by the differences between the pro-Luther and pro-Zwingli reform groups, but also because too many Frenchmen read the earlier works of the German reformer. In a certain measure, these admitted the value of honoring the saints and the existence of purgatory. On the other hand, these errors had already been condemned in Strasbourg, even in public sermons, for several years, Guillaume Farel à Jean Pomeranus, Strasbourg, (vers 8 octobre, 1525), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 397.
Strasbourgian innovators, especially Zwingli, Capiton, and Cecolampadius—if not in actual fact, at least in the minds of observers.

Does the fact that Lefèvre was in contact with the international disciples of radical evangelism mean that he wanted to go as far as they had? Admittedly, if he did not, his words of praise for them are difficult to understand. Not only was Lefèvre corresponding with them, but also he was receiving their publications and passing them on to others. In April, 1524, Lefèvre informed Farel that he had read the books sent by Antonius a Bleto of Lyons,77 and also that he had received from Farel the books that he had requested,78 but that, not having had the opportunity of reading them, he had given them to Briçonnet. Lefèvre received two books from Zwingli, one on the Mass79 and the other a defense the Zurich reformer wrote when charged

77 Hermijard notes that Antonius a Bleto was occupied with commerce and banking and that, on his business trips to Switzerland and Germany, he was "zealous in the cause of the Reformation," ibid., 207, n. 3.

78 Cf. ibid., 185-186, regarding the loss of this letter (of January 13, 1524) in which Lefèvre requested Farel to send him certain books, and possibly other pieces of their correspondence.

79 Zwingli's De Canone Missae, Tiguri, 1523, is significantly noted here, for the Mass was ordered abolished at Zurich in the autumn of 1523, though, because of opposition by the cathedral chapter, it was not until almost two years later that it was actually replaced by a simple communion service.
with certain misdoings. Furthermore, he obtained the catechism of Lonicerus (Lonier), the defense of Simon Hess against Fisher, Melanchthon's annotations on the Epistles and Gospels, and a polemical book against the doctors of the Sorbonne. Of the various books which were reaching Lefèvre, he admitted "omnia quae a te veniunt et Germania mihi maxime placent." Some of them were merely humanist productions, but in general they serve as an indication of the commerce of heterodox novelties which circulated among the religious reformers.

80 Apologia, qua in publicis Helvetiorum comitibus Bernae congregatis, ad quaedam falsa sibi intentata crimina respondit HULDRICUS ZUHULIUS, /n. p./, 1523.

81 Catechesis de bona Dei voluntate erga quemvis Christianum. Deque Sanctorum cultu et invocatione. Basle, 1623.


83 MELANCHTHONIS Annotationes in Epistol. Pauli ad Romanos unam ad Corinthios duas, Argentorati, 1623.--Ejusdem in Evangel. Ioannis et Matthaei annotationes, Basileae, 1623.

84 Confutatio determinationis Doctorum Parrhsianorum, contra M. L. ex Ecclesiasticis doctoribus desumpta, demou recognita et locupletata. Adiecta est Disputatio Groningae habita, cum duabus Epistolis non minus pia quam erudita, Basileae, 1623.

85 Le Fevre d'Étapes à Guillaume Farel, Paris, 20 avril, (1524), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 207 and 207-208, nn. 4-8, 14-15.
A personal friendship and regard for the members of the radical group was evidenced in Lefèvre’s frequent request to Farel to remember him to Oecolampadius, Hugwald,86 and Zwingli. Lefèvre greeted Farel for Roussel, Antoine F[apillon], Matthias F[Saunier]87 “l’élu,”88 Pierre du Fosse, and “all men and women who love Christ.”89 Apparently, Lefèvre was edified as a result of his contacts with the radicals, and testified that the letters he received from Farel and from their mutual friends at Basel, Oecolampadius, Pellican,90 and Hugwald, were a source of consolation to him.91

86 Huldrich Hugwald, after having visited the greater part of Germany, came to study at Basel in 1519, ibid., 209, n. 19.

87 Saunier was a preacher at Meaux, ibid., n. 23. Our knowledge of him, like that of Papillon, Fosse, and others frequently mentioned in the correspondence of the Meaux reformers, is most obscure.

88 This was an administrative title, held at Meaux by Nicolas Le Sueur, ibid., n. 24.

89 Le Fèvre à Farel, 20 avril, (1524), ibid., 207, 209, zn. 21–22. On August 24, 1524, Roussel greeted Farel for Lefèvre, “l’élu,” and all the Christians near him, ibid., 272–273. On the same date, Roussel informed Oecolampadius that Lefèvre salutes him in Christ and wishes him well, ibid., 278. Jacques Fauvené asked Farel, on October 5, (1524), to remember Lefèvre and Roussel to Oecolampadius, Hugwald, Zwingli, and all the faithful they know, ibid., 293. Such an exchange of greetings, as can be seen from these few examples, was not an uncommon occurrence.

90 Herminjard indicates that Pellicanus (Conrad Kurschner), a Hebrew scholar and a pupil of Reuchlin, and a monk since the age of fifteen, had on more than one point already separated from the Roman Church, e.g., in 1512 he had declared that the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist were for him only symbols of the spiritual nourishment transmitted to the soul by faith, ibid., 117, n. 4.

91 Le Fèvre d’Étapes à Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 6 juillet, 1524, ibid., 220.
There is one point on Lefèvre's contacts with the schismatic group which merits special consideration. When Farel recognized in him some theses he thought were similar to those John Huss preached at Breslau on grace, Christian liberty, and the marriage of priests, \( ^{92} \) Lefèvre replied "Mirum est quam consono spiritu de verbo Dei, de summo Christi sacerdotio, de matrimonio omnia dicantur." \( ^{93} \) This answer seems to have been at least a vague approbation of the Theses of the Bohemian reformer and a confirmation of Farel's observation on the similarity between them and some of Lefèvre's own statements.

The relations with the extremists did not have a uniform influence on the members of Briçonnet's entourage. Roussel indicated that the letters of the "eminent" Zwingli and Oecolampadius had produced on him less of an effect than the suggestions of his own weak flesh and the fears of his co-workers who counsel that the moment is not yet propitious to provoke a public dispute on religion. \( ^{94} \) Again, Roussel informed Oecolampadius of the

\( ^{92} \) These theses of Huss are printed verbatim in the Latin in ibid., 228-231.

\( ^{93} \) Le Fèvre à Farel, 6 juillet, 1524, ibid., 220.

\( ^{94} \) Gerard Roussel à Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 24 aôut, 1524, ibid., 271. Cf. also Roussel's testimony that his soul has been fortified by personal relations with "this intrepid pastor," namely, Oecolampadius; Gerard Roussel à Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 6 juillet, 1524, ibid., 233.
difference between the evangelic harvests in Zurich and in France: in the
former, a rich harvest is already being reaped by many intrepid workers,
while, in the latter, where the harvest is also abundant, the Gospel has
many enemies, a small number of timid defenders, and even "some evangelists
who cannot bear to burden themselves with the cross of Christ."\textsuperscript{95}

Such a close association between those in communion with Rome
and the schismatics is difficult to understand. It may be that, in some
cases, the radical tendencies of Strasbourg or Zurich had a milder effect
in the Meaux environment. Brignonnet, after reading the "inspirational"
letters of Oecolampadius, for example, was led to inaugurate in his diocese
the preaching on the Pauline Epistle by Roussel and other evangelic
preachers.\textsuperscript{96} But because the bishop and the "group of Meaux" intended to
accomplish religious reform within the fold of the Church, they could not
safely take their cues from those in open rupture with Rome.

\textsuperscript{95} Gerard Roussel à Jean Oecolampade, Meaux, 24 août, 1524, ibid., 276. This letter is significant, for in it an important member
of the Meaux censacle asks the opinion of a radical reformer on a specific
doctrinal point of Catholicism; Roussel asks Oecolampadius, if this is
not too indiscreet, for his views on the doctrine of the Fathers on Limbo
and the state of infants who die without baptism, ibid., 278.

\textsuperscript{96} Le Fèvre à Farel, 6 juillet, 1524, ibid., 221-222.
CHAPTER V

LEFÈVRE D'ÉSTAPLES:

ATTITUDES OF

THE ROYAL FAMILY, THE SORBONNE, AND THE PARLEMENT OF PARIS

We have watched Lefèvre's thought develop through his youth and his days as a student, professor, and scholar, and have noted how he came slowly but certainly to fix his attention solely upon religious subjects, finally crowning his work with biblical studies. We have observed not only his quiet, scholarly work but also his relations with the "group of Meaux" and his attitude toward the extremists as well. Before studying the latter years of Lefèvre's life, it would also be indicative of his religious mind to see how he appeared to those of a mental stamp different from his own—the ultra-orthodox theologians, the religious radicals, and those caught in the midst of this whirling maelstrom of opinions.

At this period, the Sorbonne, led particularly by two of its members, Noël Bédier¹ and Pere Guillaume Du Chesne (Quercus),² headed the forces of

---

¹ Bédier was called Beda in remembrance of Venerable Bede, but was distinguished from the early English scholar as "Bede, pas le venerable," Glorian, a contemporary, titled him "belius," brute, Doumergue, Jean Calvin, I, 95 and n. 6. Erasmus referred to Bédier as "truncus verius quam hocque," Erasme de Rotterdam à Nicolas Everard, Malines, (au mois de mai), 1521, Hermindard, Correspondance, I, 65. Espousing an almost unique point of view is Albert Hyvernoix, who calls Bédier "le plus courageux champion de l'Eglise contre les premières hérétiques de son temps en France," "Noël Bédier, d'après des documents inédits (1533-1634)," Revue des questions historiques, XXVIII, 1902, 579; cf.

²
reaction against the kind of rejuvenation that was necessary in the scholastic and religious system. Bedier was bitterly opposed to humanism, for he thought that heresy was originating among its followers.\(^5\) As syndic of the theological

\[
\text{FERET, who says that Bedier was "most zealous for the Catholic faith." Faculté de théologie, II, 17. Even Catholic authors of strongly orthodox tendencies usually point out that Bedier was under the spell of the decadent form of scholastic philosophy and, as a result, his views were often distorted on questions which were not fundamental to the faith, e.g., of Dainville, Naissance, ch. I.}
\]

2 Du Chesne, the parish priest of Saint-Jean-en-Greve at Paris, was known more popularly as "Quercus" and was styled "stercus," meaning "muck," by Glarian, Doumercq, Jean Calvin, I, 25. However, in a Sorbonne manuscript he is termed "docteur inmige" and by Fabricius "docteur célèbre." Quercus had ardently defended the prerogatives of the council of Pisa-Milan in which he played a prominent part; later, he was named by Parliament as an inquisitor of the faith for several archbishoprics, bishoprics (including Meaux), and chapters, Feret, Faculté de théologie, II, 6. In a sixteenth-century play, "La farce des theologastes," "La Maxima Quercus" is taken to task for preaching that "the text of Scripture is worth nothing, but only the gloss," Édouard Fournier, Le théâtre français avant la Renaissance, 1450-1550, mystères, moralités, et farces, 3rd ed., Paris, [1928], 422. This play was written by a friend of Louis de Berquin, a Lutheran who had been seized as a heretic, to commemorate his being set free on August 3, 1528. This same friend of Berquin invented the opprobrious name of "theologastes" for the type of Sorbonne theologians exemplified by Bedier and Quercus, Émile Picot, "Les moralités poétiques, ou la controverse religieuse dans l’ancien théâtre français," BSFPA, XXXVI, 1887, 252-253.

3 Illustrative of this point are some of the farces of the reign of Francis I. "Le maître d’escelle," for example, is obviously the product of a Catholic pen, for, while recognizing the religious abuses of the day and advising men "voire à l’Eglise" for reform, it is almost brutal against the inanity of the decadent scholasticism to cope with contemporary problems. In the play, the master instructs his pupils in the doctrines of the School. "Ces bambins venimeux," very proud of all their lessons, are fiercely opposed to the "innovators"/humanists/ and desire vengeance against them and their books. Both the teacher and his pupils equate every attempt at reform with heresy, Fournier, Le théâtre français, 412-416.
faculty, he wielded vast influence against this "new learning," in contrast to a group of more moderate theologians who recognized the inevitability of some kind of change.

Bédier evidenced his feelings toward the plans of the humanists for reform as early as 1514 in the Reuchlin controversy. Since that year, when Lefèvre had stood beside the Hebrew scholar against the hostile theological faculties of Cologne and Paris, Bédier seemed to have conceived a special dislike for Lefèvre personally and an even more intense distrust for the reformist measures for which he stood.

The incident which served as the "casus belli" for the controversy between them, however, was Lefèvre's publication in 1518 of an exegetical work entitled Disceptatio de Maria Magdalenæ et Triduo Christi. This affirmed that the identification, traditionally made in the Western Church, of Mary Magdalen, Mary, the sinner of Luke, 7, 37, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus, rested on confusion, for actually they were three different persons. On August 22, 1518, Marc Grandval, a canon of St. Victor, challenged Lefèvre's thesis in his Disceptationis de Magdalenæ defensio apologiae Marcii Grandivalliæ respondens, which he dedicated to Étienne Poncher, the bishop of Paris.

Lefèvre published still a second edition of this work, De Maria Magdalenæ, triduo Christi et ex tribus una Maria, which he dedicated to François du Moulin de Rochefort. Here he criticized another tradition dear to Christians from early medieval times, namely, that St. Anne had had successively three husbands and, by each of these marriages, had given birth to a daughter
named Mary. Clichtove, in his Discertationis de Magdalenae Defensio, supported

It is interesting to notice just how the questioning of these two traditions originated. François du Moulin de Rochefort, the teacher of Francois I from 1519 to 1526 and his chaplain, explained in his Petit livret fait à l'honneur de Madame Sainute Anne that, upon Louise of Savoy's suggestion, he began to retrace the legend on the life of the Magdalen, and he called upon his friend Lefèvre d'Étaples for help in this task. On these grounds, Marie Holban believes that it was Louise who first raised the question of the Magdalen to Rochefort and not to Lefèvre himself, with whom she was not even acquainted at that time; nor could Marguerite have brought up the matter to Lefèvre because she too did not yet know him. "François du Moulin de Rochefort et la querelle de la Madeleine," Humanisme et Renaissance, II, 1935, 26, 35. Pierre Jourda, on the other hand, thinks that it was Marguerite, as much as Louise, who raised the question which came to serve as the first real conflict between the Sarbonne and the French "innovators." He feels that already Marguerite was in contact with Lefèvre, although the date she first met him cannot be determined precisely. Marguerite d'Angoulême, Duchesse d'Alençon, Reine de Navarre, (1492-1549), Paris, 1930, I, 88. Undoubtedly, however, Rochefort did play a significant role in the controversy. In 1517 he began to write his Vie de sainte Madeleine at Paris, and he continued it at Normandy. In this book he indicated his intention "montrer quil ya eu trois Mariés qui sont toute trois appelées Magdalenes." By this time, Louise already knew Lefèvre, and she charged him to establish the truth of the three Magdalens. In the spring of 1518 Lefèvre's De Maria Magdalenae appeared. In the last section of his second edition of this work, Lefèvre proved the falsity of the legend of the three marriages of St. Anne and her three daughters called Mary. Then, Bédier's attack commenced. Between the first and second edition of Lefèvre's work, Rochefort was ill. Perhaps, even before he returned to the Court, says Holban, he had undertaken the defense of Lefèvre. In his Petit livret, written between September 21, 1518, and March 31, 1519, he tried to explain to Louise the conclusions at which Lefèvre had arrived, and to the latter's arguments, Rochefort added some of his own. While he lashed out severely at the theologians, referring to Bédier as "barbouilleur théologiste," he attempted especially to move Louise truly to believe in the newly-established views, insisting especially that St. Anne, "bonne et pudique veuve fut contante d'un gent mari." Finally, Rochefort reminded Louise that she was the real cause of the trouble that had ensued from the study of the tradition of the Magdalen and requested her to write to the Pope for his advice. At the time the views on the three Magdalens were condemned, Rochefort was living in the immediate entourage of the king, and his may have been the influence which caused the ruler to forbid Parliament to proceed any farther against Lefèvre for his opinions. Holban thinks that the silence on Rochefort's death, which occurred probably in 1526, may be explained by a semi-disgrace brought on by his religious views. It may be too that Lefèvre became acquainted with the royal family through the agency of Rochefort, "François du Moulin de Rochefort,"
the views of his old master.

John Fisher, bishop of Rochester and chancellor of Cambridge, induced by Ponsonby, took up the cudgels against Lefèvre. Bédier, who first intervened on July 1, 1619, continued actively to agitate against him. But this did not prevent Lefèvre from printing still a third piece, Diœceptatio secunda de tribus et unica Magdalenæ, which he dedicated to Bricomet.

At this point, the scholarly Henri-Cornelius Agrippa de Nettesheim entered the fray in defense of Lefèvre. He admitted how difficult and dangerous it was to resist the enemies of good letters, though he was not afraid to do so. Lefèvre optimistically advised Agrippa not to be irritated that writings in favor of the truth meet so many adversaries, and predicted that a time would come when the truth would be better known and error would fall away.

Humanism et Renaissance, II, 154-155, 167-168. Cf. the more commonly-held opinion we have noted, namely, that Bricomet introduced Lefèvre to the royalty of France.

5 For the citations from Erasmus' letters which show that he regretted the whole dispute and spoke to Fisher in Lefèvre's behalf, cf. Mann, Erasme, 60-61. Budé, too, asked Fisher to moderate his criticisms of Lefèvre, Embart de la Tour, Origines, III, 116.

6 Significant for what it is worth in analyzing the beliefs of an ardent defender of Lefèvre is a letter Agrippa received from the radical Capiton in 1522. Capiton praised Agrippa, according to an account he had received from a trustworthy traveller just returned from Geneva, and who affirmed that Luther has "all his sympathies", Capiton à H.-C. Agrippa, Ottmarsheim, près de Hâle, 23 avril, 1522, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 98-99. Even if it be true that Agrippa did profess sympathy for Luther in 1522, this need not have been the case at the time he first defended Lefèvre.

7 Henri-Cornelius Agrippa de Nettesheim à J. Le Févre, (Mets, fin d'avril, 1519), ibid., 46-47.
of itself. He further counselled Agrippa, if he really wished to "descend into the arena" to fight against the theologians who anonymously were attacking the thesis on St. Anne, to do so not out of love for Lefèvre himself, but solely in the interest of the truth and out of devotion to God's mother and St. Anne. In any case, Lefèvre instructed, Agrippa should answer with charity and offend none.

In the spring of 1519 Agrippa issued his Theses on St. Anne and her one daughter against the calumniators of Lefèvre, especially three religious of Metz, whom he deemed unworthy of an answer from Lefèvre himself. In October of the same year, he informed Lefèvre that he had finished his defense of the truth, De beatissimae Annae monogamia ac unico puerperio, and had sent a copy to the anonymous "theologaster," in reality, Claude Salini. Agrippa knew that this defense would be displeasing to the cowardly Sophists who, without bothering their consciences, perfidiously attacked Lefèvre, Agrippa, and their co-workers unawares, and accused them of "haeresi et insanis opinionibus" before

8 Le Fèvre d'Étapes à H.-C. Agrippa, Paris, 20 mai, 1519, ibid., 49. Here too Lefèvre mentioned several works relative to the dispute about St. Anne and her one daughter which had been sent to him, among them one from Germany and another from the vicegeneral of the Franciscans, ibid. Save this reference, there is no extant record of these works.

9 Le Fèvre d'Étapes à H.-C. Agrippa, Paris, 20 juin, (1519), ibid., 55.

10 Henri-Cornélius Agrippa à J. Le Fèvre, Metz, 22 mai, 1519, ibid., 50-52. Agrippa listed as the major opponents Dominicus Delphinus of the Franciscan Brothers of the Observance; the Cordelier, Nicholas Orici of the Brothers Minor; and Claudius Salini, prior of the Order of Preachers and a doctor of the Sorbonne, ibid.
a credulous people. Lefèvre thanked Agrippa for all his efforts in attempting to reestablish the true history of St. Anne, but sadly warned him that he would make many enemies. He recalled to Agrippa how Reuchlin, "vir optimus pariter et doctissimus," had suffered for upholding the truth.

Little by little, the storm on the Magdalens and the three Mariæ abated, but it arose again on July 22, 1521, when Masurier preached the plurality of the Magdalens in his parish church at Meaux. Since the revival of this idea occurred after the excommunication of Luther, the Sorbonne feared it all the more and wondered at its effect on the people. In November, the theological faculty declared a heretic anyone who would try to prove, in preaching, public disputes, writing, or otherwise, that there were several Magdalens, or to place in doubt that there had not been a single one, in accordance with "certain works" published in late years. The Sorbonne settled the matter on December 1, 1521, when it issued a decree stressing that there was but one biblical Magdalen.

11 Henri-Cornelius Agrippa à Le Fevre d'Étapes, Méts, (au mois d'octobre), 1519, ibid., 56.

12 Le Fevre d'Étapes à H.-C. Agrippa, Paris, 14 novembre, 1519, ibid., 59-60.


14 Ibid., 298, 299-301; cf. Duplessis d'Argentière for the text of the decree, "Determinatio sacrae Facultatis theologicae Parisiensis de unica Maria," en date du 9 novembre, 1521, Collectio Judiciorum, II, vii. Note that nothing was said in this declaration about the three Mariæ. Though the Sorbonne continued to adhere steadfastly to the traditional view, theoretically this remained an open question.
This entire incident which touched off the quarrel between Lefèvre and the Sorbonne, though apparently trivial in itself, pointed up rather precisely the essence of the trouble between the Christian humanists and the ultra-orthodox theologians. At the basis of Bédier's attack on Lefèvre was the latter's humanism, which prompted him to expose a long-standing misinterpretation in the Church. Lefèvre and the Christian humanists who defended his views equated the evidence resulting from their critical studies with the truth. Here again, we note a connection between the reform of letters and studies with religious reform. The doctors of theology plainly indicated their antagonism to the questioning of tradition and the authority of the Church by a simple master of arts like Lefèvre, even though no doctrines of the faith were at issue. Bédier further felt that the public presentation of Lefèvre's theses would create scandal among the people and would serve to place in doubt all the institutions and practices sanctioned by the Church.15

Up to this time Lefèvre had worked quietly without the intrusion of opponents, while fellow-humanists praised his work and the science and learning of which it gave evidence. But the notoriety of the upset over the Magdalen and the three Mariés had drawn opprobrium upon his shoulders for some of his earlier activities. The Sorbonne began carefully to examine Lefèvre's Pauline Commentaries of 1612. In fact, it was really their action which led Clictova

15 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étapes," DTC, IX, 1, 149.
to write his first apology in Lefèvre's defense. Even foreign scholars and theologians felt compelled to enter the arena, on one side or the other. Diego López Zúñiga, the Spanish theologian, who had earlier written against Erasmus, was now among the first to discover "los errores allí ocultos" of the Commentaries in his Annotationes in Jacobum Fabrum Stapulensem super epistolas Pauli, published at Alcalá in 1517 and at Paris in 1522. The Sorbonne, however, actually censured Lefèvre's Commentaries only on the grounds of the preface, where he cast a shadow of doubt on Jerome's authorship of the Vulgate.

In contrast to the constant policy of animosity displayed by the Sorbonne toward Lefèvre and his "group," the royal attitudes fluctuated with an equal degree of steadiness. Francis I was attracted to Lefèvre's humanism as much from intellectual curiosity as from a desire to reform the Church. His whole policy toward the reformers, however, was conditioned by political measures in connection with his feud with Charles V.

After the Sorbonne's decree against the three Magdalens, the Parliament probably would have punished Lefèvre as a heretic had the king not intervened in his behalf. He requested Guillaume Petit, his confessor, to examine the controversial works to determine whether they actually contained statements

---

16 Villoslada, Universidad de Paris, 340; Graf, "Faber Stapulensis," ZHT, XXII, 55-86.

17 Note, however, that numerous passages in the Pauline Commentaries were singled out for condemnation in the Index Expurgatorius Librorum qui hoc saeculo prodierunt, published by the direction of Philip II in 1599, as well as in that of Quiroga in 1601. Jourdan, Catholic Reform, 123-124, n. 5.

18 Heubi, François 1er, 20.
contrary to the faith. Petit replied that the whole matter was simply one of criticism, and advised that each person should hold his own opinion and Parliament should bother no more.  

Francis was clearly under the influence of his versatile sister, Marguerite, who as early as 1521 had become a devoted of evangelical humanism. In June of that year, she requested Briçonnet at his discretion to send the preacher Arand to her for the honor of God and her own consolation. In October, not long after Lefèvre's arrival at Meaux, she and her mother, Louise, visited the diocese. Marguerite informed Briçonnet that neither wished to be deprived of the "spiritual nourishment" he had given them at Meaux, and prayed that God would bless the holy plans he formed for the royal family. She testified that the king and Madame Louise were determined to make it understood that "la vérité de Dieu n'est point hérésie," and that both were


21 Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Compiegne, avant 17 novembre, 1521, ibid., 76.

22 Le ministre Gérard Roussel et Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Compiegne, avant 17 novembre, 1521, ibid., 75.

23 Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Compiegne, avant 22 novembre, 1521, ibid., 78; F. Genin, Éd., Nouvelles lettres de la Reine de Navarre adressées au Roi François 1er, Paris, 1842, 275.
intent upon the reform of the Church. 24 Significantly, one year later, Briçonnet advised Marguerite that he and "Monsieur Fabry," as he referred to Lefèvre, had conferred and concluded that she should relent momentarily her efforts for the king's "conversion." She would be wise "ouvrir le feu pour quelque temps," since "le bois [qu'elle veut] faire brûler est si verd, qu'il estaindroit le feu." 25

In 1523 the Court publicly displayed a friendly attitude toward Fabricianism. In that year, the Sorbonne drew a list of "unorthodox" propositions from Lefèvre's Commentarii initiatiorii in quatuor evangelia. Its major errors, the doctors felt, were that (1) the early Church, which counted so many martyrs, knew no rule but the Gospel; (2) human things added to divine things bring no perfection but rather imperfection; (3) before taking food, Christ purposely did not cleanse His hands, for He wished to show that, in the divine law, human laws mean nothing; (4) the new law not only forbids perjury but also swearing itself; and (5) Pilate had received power from God only to condemn Christ and not to save Him. 26 Lefèvre refused to retract his views.

24 Marguerite d'Angoulême à Guillaume Briçonnet, Compiègne, décembre 1521, ibid., 274; Hermingard, Correspondance, I, 84.

25 Guillaume Briçonnet à Marguerite d'Angoulême, (Meaux, fin de septembre ou commencement d'octobre, 1522), ibid., 104-105; Gémin, Nouvelles lettres, 275.

26 Duplessis d'Argenté, Collectio Judiciorum, II, x-xi. Mann interprets the fifth point to mean that Lefèvre espoused the idea of "le serviteur" and predestination, since he implied that Pilate was predestined to his crime, Erasme, 72.
and requested the king to call the matter before his own tribunal. Francis acquiesced, and forbade the faculty of theology either to proceed against Lefèvre personally or to suppress his Commentaries.27

During the same period the Court was upholding Lefèvre against the Sorbonne and the Parlement, it was cooperating with them against Lutheranism. On April 15, 1521, Clichtove wrote the Sorbonne’s condemnation of the German doctrine, in accordance with the request of the Elector of Saxony for its opinion. Melancthon replied with a tract, Contre le furibond décret des theologastres parisiens. Parlement then forbade the publication of any book not first examined. On August 3 it was decreed that all who possessed a book of Luther must turn it in under penalty of a fine of one hundred livres and imprisonment, and, two months later, this edict was proclaimed by the heralds in the streets.28

The Lutheran menace altered the royal attitude toward reform. In October, 1523, Louise questioned the Sorbonne on the method of extirpating heresy and of dealing with those persons who claimed that they were falsely labelled Lutherans. The faculty of theology knew that their answers to the Queen Mother would be important because of her influence on Francis.29 Bedier, advised Louise for the public safety to inaugurate instructions and preaching

28 Doumercq, Jean Calvin, I, 92-95.
29 Crevier, Université de Paris, V, 196.
against heresy, but, if this would not suffice for making the heretics "see
the light," to use constraint against them.\textsuperscript{30}

Lutheranism did not emanate from Meaux, but it penetrated this
diocese and the rest of France simultaneously.\textsuperscript{31} Many who digested the content
of the Lutheran writings were filled with the same thirst for radicalism which
was upsetting the Germans. Recognising that severe action against the German

\textsuperscript{30} For the text of Louise's letter and the Sorbonne's reply, cf.
Duplessis d'Argentèrè, Collectio Judiciorum, II, iii-iv.

\textsuperscript{31} Moore concludes, on the basis of the evidence he adduces, that
almost all the works of Luther were known at Paris in 1521, and that from 1521
to 1524, they actually penetrated France, Réforme allemande et littérature
française, 55, 65. It would appear that Antwerp, Basel, and Strasbourg
served as the three main points of contact between German Lutheranism and
France, although the actual way in which these writings found their way into
France remains completely obscure, ibid., 88-89. In ibid., 102-155, Moore
advances several hypotheses in explanation, and it is noteworthy that Lefèvre
is involved in every one, e.g., since Lefèvre's earlier travels in Germany and
his stay in Strasbourg, he was interested in religious propaganda, and he was
probably in relations with the printer Dubois and sent him translations of
Luther which he had drawn from Alsace, ibid., 153. Moore attributes to Lefèvre,
"the true interpreter of Luther in France," certain French translations of the
German heretic's writings, ibid., 128, 310, yet he does not deny that Lefèvre
kept his own independence of thought, ibid., 177. In 1887, N. Weiss maintained
that to Berquin alone could the translations of the Lutheran tracts published
at Paris after 1525 be traced, "La litérature de la réforme française: notes
sur les traités de Luther traduits en français et imprimés en France entre
1524 et 1534," BSHPF, XXXVI, 1887, 665. However, by 1918 Weiss began to
waver in his earlier opinion, expressing uncertainty as to the real French
translator of Luther, "Louis de Berquin, son premier procès et sa rétraction
d'après quelques documents inédits (1823)," BSHPF, LXXVII, 1918, 185, n. 2.
Subsequent to the death of Weiss, several conferences at the University of
Strasbourg resulted in attributing these translations with a great probability
to Lefèvre, since he was "le chef des novateurs," the only Frenchman who dared
to publish Scriptural works in the vernacular, Réforme allemande et littérature
française, 162.
doctrine was necessary, Briçonnet in 1523 issued two synodal decrees concerning it. 32

The first decree of October 15 was directed against Luther's books and doctrines. The bishop recounted how God had preserved His Church through the centuries against the attempts of innumerable men to soil her purity, but he felt that none of these had ever been bolder than Luther in "taking the axe against the root" of the Church. Luther reversed the whole hierarchic order, overturned the state which "keeps all others in duty," 33 tried to do away with the remembrance of Christ's Passion, and considered spiritual marriage as nothing, while he even treated Dionysius, Paul's disciple, as an innovator! Briçonnet stressed how necessary it was to destroy "ce venin pestilentiel," which disposed both the weak and the strong to crimes of such a sort as to make almost no distinction between "a sect of Mohammed and the religion of Christ." The bishop of Meaux saw the basic difficulty to be Luther's suppression of all sanctions with his doctrine that each person is the proper judge of the usage he makes of his liberty. He lamented that the "entire world" was filled with his books, which captivated people by their novelties and lively style. Briçonnet feared that even sincere persons would come to exchange the

32 Baird judges that Briçonnet's decrees, which he places in 1525 rather than 1523, manifested his fear of the attacks of the Sorbonne against the "group of Meaux." These documents were intended "to overturn from the foundation the very fabric he had been striving to rear," and thus they are evidences of his "pusillanimous defection." Huguenots, I, 81 and n. 3.

33 Mere Briçonnet refers to the clergy. Cf. supra, 79, for his earlier characterization of this group.
light and truth of the Catholic faith for the "darkness, lies, and death" of Luther. Therefore, he forbade all Catholics of Meaux, under pain of excommunication, to read, buy, possess, or distribute Luther's books, or to approve or justify his doctrines, either in public sermons or private conversations.

Briçonnet's second decree was addressed to the clergies. He reminded them that, even while they were sincerely preaching evangelical truths to their flocks, several persons were abusing the Gospel by using its words falsely to support their own system. They taught that there is no purgatory and consequently it is useless to pray for the dead, just as one can receive no benefits from invoking Mary or the saints. To counteract the actions of the Lutherans, the clergy were to exhort their flocks to believe in purgatory, pray for the dead, and invoke the Blessed Virgin and the saints, especially through the litanies. In December, 1523, to prevent the spread of "la peste luthérienne," Briçonnet authorized the clergy to forbid those who held such errors to preach.

To be certain, acts of hostility to Catholicism were committed at Meaux but, far from being their inspiration, Briçonnet hastened to reprove the guilty parties. One of the reasons for linking his name with religious

---

34 Guillaume Briçonnet aux fidèles de son diocèse, Meaux, 15 octobre, 1523, trans. from the Latin in Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 155-158.

35 Guillaume Briçonnet au clergé de son diocèse, Meaux, 15 octobre, 1523, trans. from the Latin in ibid., 156-158.

36 Guillaume Briçonnet au clergé de son diocèse, Meaux, 15 décembre, 1523, ibid., 171.
radicalism stemmed from the fact that he was the bishop of the city where the
tattacks occurred. In December, 1524, he posted on the cathedral door a bull of
Clement VII, prescribing certain prayers for the restoration of peace among the
princes of Christendom and communion as conditions for gaining the indulgences
of the coming jubilee year. Secretly, Jean Leclerc, a Lutheran, removed the
bishop's announcement, replaced it with a placard which treated the Pope as
Antichrist, and tore to pieces the formulas of the prescribed prayers. 37

On January 21, 1525, Briçonnet spoke to his clergy about the "enfants
de pérdition et membres de Satan" who performed anti-Catholic deeds in the
diocese. He remarked that the Holy Father was deeply offended by these grievous
criimes. Briçonnet would allow the culprits six days after the publication of
this decree to confess their misdeeds; if, by the end of that period, they had
not repented, he would vow "une éternelle malédiction" against them and declare
them excommunicated. 38

Briçonnet must have realized that he no longer could keep reform
within the limits he had traced out. Catholics suspected him, and Lutherans
considered him their foe. Lefèvre's own situation at Meaux was rendered more
difficult by the plight of his patron. Many conservative thinkers were gripped
by a real fear that all efforts at reform would end in extremism. Thus the
peaceful reform of Meaux and the group which inaugurated and encouraged it were

37 Baird, Huguenots, I, 87 and n. 2.
38 Guillaume Briçonnet au clergé de son diocèse, Meaux, 21 janvier,
1525, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 320-322.
caught in a net of contrary opinions. From this time on, most observers tended to equate Catholic Fabrisianism with Lutheranism.

The "incredible rumor" spread that Briçonnet, aided by Lefèvre, burned all images except the crucifix in his diocese. In 1526 a contemporary chronicler wrote:

Et faut noter que la plus grande partie de Meaulx estoit infectée de la fausse doctrine de Luther, et disoit-on, qu'un nommé Fabry, prestre, estudiant avec autres, estoit cause des diots embrouillemens, et entre autres choses, qu'il ne falloit avoir se églises aucunes images, ne prendre cauës béniste pour effaser tous les pochez, ne prier pour les trespasex, à cause qu'incontinent après le trespas ils alloient en paradis ou en enfer, et qu'il n'y avoit nu purgatoire, et qu'il n'estoit vray et ne le croyait pas.

Another anonymous contemporary writer explained how a disciple of Luther helped to introduce the German doctrine into the environs of Paris. Moore feels that the description refers to Lefèvre even though he was not so radical as depicted.

---


40 Pierre de Sébiville au Chevalier Coot, Grenoble, 28 décembre, 1524, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 315. Were this true, Briçonnet would have been commanded to appear immediately before Parliament, nor would history have passed over in silence a bishop's destruction of images in an entire diocese, ibid., no. 11.


42 Reforme allemande et litterature francaise, 256-257.
D'ung sault bastard Luther print alliance
Secretement qui estoit a Paris
Qui fist des maux en l'eglise a outrance
Mettant plusieurs heresies en France
Par son fault art, lequel moy same apris;
Il s'enfouyt, car il sust ete prins
De par la courte pleine de gens loyaulx
Qui mist au feu plusieurs tissiers de Meaulx.
Melas! j'estoys alors estudiant
Que ce meschant usoit de ses practiques,
L'eglise alleit par tout repudiant,
Lisant, parlant, saultement pallyant
Pour attirer plusieurs a ses boutiques;
Femmes et tout apprenoyent ses cantiques;
Pour attraper beguines et gaultiers.
Mist en francaos evangiles, psaltiers.
Apres qu'il sust translated l'Eescripture;
Il fist prérer paigneurs et eschardeurs,
Femmes aussi, qui est contre nature;
Ung Michelet se mist a l'adventure
Qui dedans Meaulx faisoit du caffardeurs
Il est appuy du patron des fondeurs,
Qui l'envoye barbouiller Normandie,
La ou la foy en aulcuns lieu mandye.45

In March, 1525, Parlement created a commission of four inquisitors,
two councillors and two theologians, to judge "heretics" without appeal, and
on May 20 the commission received apostolic powers from the Pope.44 The
inquisitors entered Meaux to gain information on the suspected persons there.
Briconnet, however, was summoned in October to come before the Parlement at
Paris to confer with its president "d'ausmes choses concernant le fait de son
diocese."45 This, of course, meant that he was to give testimony on his part

45 Ibid.
44 C. Roussel a Guillaume Farel, Meaux, 25 septembre, 1525,
Hermijard, Correspondance, I, 392.
46 Ibid., 315, no. 11.
in the Lutheran crimes committed at Meaux. Actually, the bishop was questioned by only a few members of the Parlement, though he petitioned to be tried before the entire body. He was allowed to return to his diocese when he gave sufficient guarantees against a repetition of anti-Catholic deeds there, though he had to pay two hundred livres to cover the expense of bringing to trial the "heretics" he himself had helped to create.46

Upon his return to Meaux, Briçonnet seemed more conservative and acted rigorously against those known to be unorthodox. He sanctioned persecutory measures against such violent reformers as Jacques Pauvan and the unnamed "Hermit of Livry." The worst culprits were either banished or burned. The more moderate offenders were imprisoned for a specified period, either in a monastery or the prisons of the bishop.47

The theologian Edward Lee told Wolsey that not only the bishop but also his chaplain, James Faber, had been called in judicium, because Luther's

---


47 One woolcarder of Meaux who held that it was unnecessary to pray for our trespasses and to use holy water and images was arrested for his Lutheran beliefs. He had to make amends before Notre Dame de Paris, at Palays, then before the cathedral at Meaux, after which he was sent to the bishop's prisons to live on bread and water for seven years. Lalanne, Journal d'un bourgeois, 285.
had made "some stir" in Paris and the see of Meaux. 48 The inquisitorial commission did, in fact, aim particularly at Lefèvre and his confrères, ordering that he, Caroli, Mazurier, and Roussel should be captured in a body, while Parliament instructed the regent to send to Paris for the examination of Arande. 49 Neither Lefèvre nor any members of his "group" could count now on the royal intervention which earlier had defied the orders of the Sorbonne and the Parliament. Francis I, a prisoner in Madrid, could not enforce any requests he would make in their behalf, and Marguerite, still enthusiastic for the Gospel, was spending some time in Spain in negotiations for her brother's liberty. Thus, near the end of October, 1525, Lefèvre, with Caroli and Roussel, fled to Strasbourg. Arande for a while remained with the Court at Lyons 50 but soon arrived at Strasbourg where he again temporarily joined his Meaux colleagues. 51

Did Lefèvre set out for Strasbourg because he was fully sympathetic with the religious system in operation there, or was it simply the safest

48 Edward Lee to Thomas Wolsey, Bordeaux, December 2, 1525, Luther's Correspondence, II, 354-355.
49 Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 401, n. 1.
50 Michel Bentin à Cecolampade, Lyons, 8 octobre, (1525) Ibid., 399.
51 Ibid., 406, n. 8, and 409, n. 1.
place for a retreat in the face of the hostile Sorbonnists? All but two writers hold that he left France for fear of the charges pending against him. He had received a pronounced warning of danger ahead when Parlement on August 28, 1526, condemned nine propositions extracted from his Commentaries on the Gospels, and he realised the antagonism against him as a result of his French translations of Scripture. Erasmus asserted that Lefèvre's publication of his French translation of the Gospels was the very reason for his departure. Possibly, another reason was the threatened investigation of his


53 Curiously enough, the somewhat dubious authority, the deist, Pierre Bayle, cites some pertinent and interesting information unavailable elsewhere. He says that Lefèvre journeyed to Strasbourg by the order of Marguerite, then Queen of Navarre, to confer with Bucer and Capiton on the reformation of the Church, "Jacques le Fèvre d'Étaples," Dictionnaire historique et critique de Pierre Bayle, nouv. éd., Paris, 1820, VI, 474. He obtained this bit of information from the Life of Capiton, which he quotes as follows: "Tanta statim Capitonis et Bucerî fama fuit, ut Jacobus Faber Stapulensis, et Gerardus Rufus olam e Gallia profecti, Capitonem et Bucerum audierint, atque de omnibus doctrinae praeceptuis locis cum ipsis disseruerint, missi a Margaretha Francisci regis sorore Navarræ Regina," (Melch. Adams., Vita Capitonis, pag. 90. Il cite Johannes Sturmius Anti-Pappe 4, pag. 3) in ibid., 476, n. C. Bayle claims that Erasmus, who did not know that Lefèvre had been sent to Strasbourg by Marguerite, wrote in March, 1526, that he fled there as a fugitive, "Faber Stapulensis Gallia profugus agit Argentorati, sed mutato nomine quemadmodum Comicus ille senex," ibid., 476.

54 Baird, huguenots, I, 93.

55 Erasme à Pirkheimer, 6 juin, 1526, Berminjard, Correspondance, I, 421, n. 6.
Les Épistres et Évangiles. 56

Actually, all these reasons seem very probable. Petrus Sutor (Le Pierre Couturier), a doctor of theology, just about the time of Lefèvre's departure, directed against him and Erasmus a tract entitled De tralatione Bibliae et novarum reprobationibus interpretationum. This asserted the imutility of studying ancient languages for understanding Scripture and even more for the purpose of making a new translation, and stated that only a heretic would maintain that the Vulgate was not wholly adequate. 57

Then, on November 6, 1525, the Sorbonne labelled forty-eight statements of Les Épistres et Évangiles "Lutheran errors" and propositions contrary

56 Cf. supra. 84. Graf thinks this was the immediate cause for Lefèvre's exit from France, "Pater Stapulensis," ZHT, XXIII, 78.

57 Desmurge, Jean Calvin, I, 103. Reformers of every stamp insisted on the necessity of knowing the ancient languages to explain Holy Scripture properly. Roussel told Briconnet of his regret at not having known before his departure for Strasbourg of the bishop's plan to send him to a certain place near Avignon where he would have been able, as he desired, to study Hebrew thoroughly, though he admitted that at Strasbourg he found some men learned in languages who had the gift of explaining Scripture, Jean Tolminus G. Roussel à l'Évêque de Meaux, Strasbourg, au mois de décembre, 1525, Ibid., I, 405. Zwingli requested Francis I to "reduce to silence" the group of Sorbonne theologians who scorn the ancient tongues, and he compared them to another genre of doctors who cultivate "celestial sciences" more than human knowledge and who possess all that comes as a result, familiarity with languages, simplicity of customs, and holiness of life, Ulric Zwingli au Roi de France, Zurich, (au mois de mars), 1525, Ibid., 550-551. As late as April, 1630, the Sorbonne censured as "false and impious, temerarious and scandalous" the proposition that Holy Writ cannot be well-understood without a knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and similar tongues, Duplessis d'Argentré, Collectio Judiciorum, II, lxxviiii.
to the faith. Most of these, textually extracted, were censured as "heretical" and the others as "false, temerarious, and dangerous." The major errors were that all one's sins can be pardoned if only he has faith in Jesus Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection; works are of no value; neither human nor ecclesiastical laws have any worth; and neither the angels nor the saints should be invoked but only Christ. The Sorbonne remarked that Lefèvre's book was contrary even within itself; though its whole message was to preach nothing but the Gospel, it reaffirmed old heresies like Manicheanism and Wycliffism, as well as Lutheranism, and even included a proposition akin to Arianism.58

On February 5, 1526, Parliament supported the Sorbonnian decree against Les Épîtres et Évangiles by a general proclamation which forbade all translations of the books of Holy Writ into French, the printing of Lutheran writings, and the publication of any statements against Church ordinances.59

While Lefèvre was being censured through his writings, he and his confrères were at least safe from bodily harm at Strasbourg. Their association with the extremists, however, was bound to have serious consequences for their cause. They recognized that, should they return to France, they would be reproached for having compromised with persons in open rupture with the

58 Ibid., xxxv-xl.

59 Lalanne, Journal d'un bourgeois, 276.
Church. To prevent this, each member of the "group" took an assumed name. But either Lefèvre was so distinguished that his incognito could not be maintained, for even the boys in the streets knew him by name; or, as Roussel lamented, Lefèvre took so little care to conceal his identity that the place of his retreat would become known by all his persecutors.

While Lefèvre and Roussel lived more or less in the fringe of the radical reform movement in Strasbourg, they did not observe it with less interest. Both manifested their pleasure at what had been accomplished. Roussel was certain that Briçonnet would be filled with joy if he could witness the prevailing state of religion there. Convents had been transformed into schools, and the teachers, who lived partially by the fruits of manual labor, were scholarly, pious, simple, and sincere. There was a prevailing solicitude for the poor, Roussel observed, and even the pastors knew no illicit gain. How scandalized those persons would be who are used to placing too great a stress on the exterior means of worship if they could observe these reforms! All things invented by man for the worship of God—Masses, images, and prayers for the dead—have been abolished, while a single altar remains where communion

60 Roussel feared that their adversaries, who were inquiring on the presence of his companion Lefèvre in Strasbourg, would take up this fact to excite new embarrassment for the "group of Meaux," Jean Tolninus G. Roussel à l'Eveque de Meaux, Strasbourg, decembre, 1625, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 406.

61 Baird, Huguenots, I, 93.

62 Érard Roussel, Nicholas Le Sueur, (Strasbourg, au mois de decembre, 1525), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 410.
is celebrated just as it was in the time of Christ: "Hoc solus Christus colitur per suum Verbum, solusque pro capite suscipiatur ex fundamento." Even the Papists scarcely dared to murmur, Roussel told his friends at Meaux, and admitted that he willingly prolongs his sojourn in Strasbourg.

Roussel's expression of his joy that the Mass, the very heart of Catholic life, had been discarded at Strasbourg may be considered a real indication of his radical desires. His words here also serve as proof that there was really no such closely-knit unit as the "group of Meaux." Its members had in common only the wish for reform, but, as they became exposed to new and varied influences, the reformist desires of some were dyed a deeper hue.

No such definite particulars on Lefèvre's reactions to reform in the German city have come down to us, but he did express in general a joy similar to that of Roussel. Farel relates that, when he reminded his former master of his earlier prediction—"Voici par la grace de Dieu, le commencement de ce qu'autrefois m'avez dit du renouvellement du monde"—Lefèvre blessed God and begged Him to perfect what had begun in Strasbourg.

At that same time that Roussel and Lefèvre were expressing their satisfaction with the Strasbourghian reforms in 1526, certain radical reformers were complaining that both of them lacked the courage to carry their convictions to fruition. Pierre Toussain, who had earlier resided at Meaux,

---

63 Id., ibid., 400; Jean Tolnixs, É. Roussel à L'Eveque de Meaux, Strasbourg, au mois de décembre, 1525, ibid., 407-408.

recounted that Roussel and Lefèvre kept saying "Nondum est tempus, nondum venit hora," but he singled out the latter as the one who really had "no spirit."\(^{65}\)

The facts of Lefèvre's life become more specific with the release of Francis I from his Spanish prison on March 17, 1526. Soon the king was in Paris, and he invited Lefèvre, Roussel, and their co-workers to return to France.\(^{66}\) In April, 1526, on his journey back, Lefèvre stopped at Basel to visit Erasmus, who rejoiced in the good fortune which came to the French humanist as a result of the king's protection.\(^{67}\) Francis realized that it was no longer possible for the "group" to reside at Meaux, for the Sorbonne and Parliament still kept Briçonnet and his diocese under a scrutinizing surveillance. Since the most complete security was to be found in the king's

\(^{65}\) Pierre Toussain à Jean Cocolampade, Malesherbes, 26 juillet, (1526), Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 447.

\(^{66}\) In a letter from Basel on May 17, 1527, Erasmus testified that Lefèvre had been honorably recalled to France, "Hinc honorificiis revocatus est in Galliam, cessaret enim mutu et est regi sharissimus," Bayle, "Jacques le Fèvre," Dictionnaire, VI, 476. Roussel arrived shortly after Lefèvre, and served as Marguerite's chaplain after her marriage to Henri d'Albret, king of Navarre, in January, 1527. Arande stopped at the Court on his way to Dauphiny, where he was solemnly received as bishop of St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux, Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 399, n. 4. With the exception of Caroli, who had early displayed tendencies toward religious innovation, the major members of the ensemble of Meaux after this time were no longer really active in reformist activities. In the 1530's Caroli fled from France and entered the camp of the militant Evangelical Protestants at Lausanne, though it seems that he never really held to their beliefs. In 1537, he requested the Pope for absolution and was recalled to France by the king, Jourdan, Catholic Reform, 309 and nn. 2-4.

\(^{67}\) Erasmus à J. de Lasky, cited in Mann, Erasm, 155, n. 4.
immediate entourage, Lefèvre was appointed tutor to his two daughters and his
third and favorite son, Abdenago, the Duke of Angoulême, as well as librarian
at Blois. This position afforded Lefèvre a splendid opportunity to use the
resources of the fine library there. With Roussel, who had arrived at Blois
by June, Lefèvre worked on a translation of the homilies of St. John
Chrysostom on the Acts of the Apostles. 68

Although the safety of Lefèvre’s person seemed assured under the
protective eye of the royal family, his writings continued to be under fire.
Another attack was made by Petrus Sutor, who in 1525 had written against
translations of the Bible. Even more bitter and vituperative assaults against
Lefèvre and Erasmus were undertaken by Bédier on May 28, 1526, in his
Annotations on their works. 70 Here Bédier coined the term “fabrisian,”

68 Erasmus knew of their work and was well-disposed toward them,
writing on March 24, 1527, to Lefèvre: “Audie tibi tuaque Gerardo Ruffo datum
necosium a Rege Christianissimo, ut Chrysostomi commentarios in Acta Apostolorum
latine vertetis . . . . Opus tum senectuti laetam tranquillitatem. Ruffo tuo
plurimam ex me salutem dicite. Optimo praesule Bignonet cupio esse quam
commendatissimum,” Harmijnard, Correspondance, II, 16-17, n. 2. Evidently
Erasmus did not know that Lefèvre no longer resided at Meaux, ibid., n. 1.

69 Annotationum Natalis Bedae . . . in Jacobum Fabrum Stapulensem libri
duo et in Desid. Erasum Noticer. Liber usus qui ordine tertius est. Prima
in Commentaries ipsius Fabri Super Epp. S. Pauli. Secundus in eisdem Commen-
et eis apud apostolicae epp., Paris, 1526.

70 It is significant that Bédier directed his work against both
Erasmus and Lefèvre. He had, in fact, blamed many of the troubles over the
"heretics" on Erasmus, for having originally proclaimed the utility of trans-
lating Holy Scripture. (Erasmus had spoken of translations in the vernacular
in the preface to the second edition of his New Testament in 1519.) Bédier
felt that neither the authorities in the Germanies nor the bishop of Meaux were
in a position to be happy over these translations. He made the accusation that
the acts of hostility against the Catholic cult had been committed at Meaux by
which later Doumercerg and other writers would apply to Lefèvre's "Protestantism:"

Si la secte des malheureux luthériens eût pris comme il convenait le nom de son premier chef, je ne sais si on l'eût appelée luthérienne, du nom de Luther, ou fabriquée du nom de Faber.71

A vitriolic anger over Bédier's attack was displayed by Erasmus, not only because it was directed at him, but also because of the conservative syndic's general tenor of thought. Erasmus hoped that the re-establishment of peace would permit the "two great Christian monarchs" to favor good studies and to remedy the "intolerable evils of the Church." As a step toward the fulfillment of his wish, he requested the king to use his authority to impose silence on Sutor and Bédier, who had published books "full of ignorance and bad faith" against him and Lefèvre. He labelled them "pharisees who pronounce on heresy" and who cause many good persons to be imprisoned or burned as a result.72 In compliance with the wish of Erasmus, Francois once again came to

---

71 Douen, "La réforme française," BSHPF, XLI, 72-73. Undoubtedly, there was much confusion of terms. In general, conservatives applied the label "lutheran" to any person or opinion which seemed revolutionary, Moore, Réforme allemande et litterature française, 284. Arnold Fabrice wrote from Paris on January 23, 1535, to his friend, Duhart, at Poitiers: "Zuinglianae, Cocalampadiana sectae homines, quos vulgus Lutherman vocat," Joannis Gelidae Valentini Epistolae, Rochellae, 1571, cited in Herminjard, Correspondance, I, 353, n. 1.

72 Erasme de Rotterdam à François Ier, Bale, 16 juin, 1526, ibid., I, 435-439.
the defense of the humanists. On August 3, 1626, he ordered Parliament to have special judges examine the books of Erasmus and Lefèvre and to forbid the circulation of Bédier's writings, while in March, 1627, Bédier was asked personally why he had attacked the king's protégés. 73

The question which naturally raises itself is whether Lefèvre's actions or writings after his return to France showed any influences of the Strasbourg reform, and thus whether Bédier was justified in increasing his criticisms of Lefèvre. It is difficult to answer such a question without much qualification. First, even prior to Lefèvre's flight to Strasbourg, he and the "group of Meaux" were in contact with the ideas of Farel and other Swiss and German extremists through their letters and literature. Though the ideas of the radical reformers were not new to the "group," they may have been influenced by witnessing the very practical religious reforms of Strasbourg in operation. Psychologically, the actual observation of the system there could have made Lefèvre and Roussel more enthusiastic for further French reform based solely on the Gospel. Their stay in the German city may have contributed to intensify in them still more the reformist tendency. This may explain too the accentuation of the "Protestant" ideas in Lefèvre's Commentarii in Epistolae catholicae, dedicated to Cardinal Antoine du Prat, the French Chancellor, and published at Basel. 74 But, according to Lefèvre, his purpose in issuing these

73 Imbert de la Tour, Origines, III, 257-259.

74 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," DTC, IX, 1, 151-152; cf. Mann, who feels that, since the stay of Lefèvre and Roussel in Strasbourg, "new influences" were felt in France, Erasme, 152.
Commentaries was the same that had inspired his earlier works, "to serve the cause of Jesus Christ." He felt they would offend only those opposed to "the pure Christian doctrine." Then, for the wider spread of this pure Christianity, by 1526 Lefèvre completed his translation of the entire Bible into French.

In February, 1529, a work entitled Apologia adversus clandestinos lutheranos issued from the Sorbonne to indicate the "heresies" which appeared in all the writings of Lefèvre. His major errors were that, because of man's darkened will, he is unable to cooperate with divine grace and is a purely passive instrument in the hands of God, that faith alone is sufficient for salvation, and that it is useless to honor the saints.76

The exigencies of Francis I's political maneuvers did not now allow him to protect those suspected of heresy by the powerful Parisian theological faculty.77 In any case, his attitude toward them seemed changed, and Lefèvre was somewhat disturbed in his retreat at Blois.78 He requested the Queen of

75 Le Fèvre d'Étapes à Chancelier Antoine du Prat, aout, 1527, Hermijard, Correspondance, II, 35.  
76 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étapes," DTC, IX, 1, 155.  
77 Jourdan, Catholic Reform, 298.  
78 A letter of Bucer indicates that Peregrinus [Lefèvre] did not spend all his time at Blois, but that he resided temporarily at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, [Martin Bucer] à Guillaume Farel, Strasbourg, 1 mai, (1528), Hermijard, Correspondance, II, 132. This assertion is confirmed by a passage in the Journal d'un bourgeois, that at the beginning of April, just after Easter, the children of the king came from Blois to Saint-Germain-en-Laye by his command, 341.
Navarre to seek permission from her brother that he might leave his present
retreat for one of even greater obscurity where he would be safe from further
molestation by his enemies.\footnote{79} Nérac in Gascony, Marguerite's ordinary residence.
Accordingly, she wrote to her nephew, the Grand Master, in May, 1550:

Le bonhomme Fabry m'a escript qu'il s'est trouve un peu
mal à Bloys, avequ'es ce qu'on l'a voulu fascher par de la.
Et pour changer d'air, il croit volontiers voir ung any sien
pour ung temps, s'il le plaisir du Roy estoit luy vouloir donner
congie. Il a mis ordre en sa librairie, côte les livres,
et mis tout par inventaire, lequel il baillera a qui il
plaira au Roy. Je vous prie demander son congie au Roy.\footnote{80}

The king granted his permission, and Lefèvre retired to Nérac, on the way
paying a short visit to Arande.

\footnote[79]{Actually, Blois was not a sure place for a retreat. Louis
Guillard, the bishop of Chartres, was not favorable to those accused of
heresy; it was he who had Clément Marot arrested and imprisoned. On September
31, 1537, he personally went to Blois and there commenced a proceeding for
heresy against Nicolas de Saint-Gelais, apostolic protonotary, and Guillaume
Dénis, Marguerite's doctor, Doumercq, Jean Calvin, I, 400, n. 3. Both of
these men were close associates of the King's sister, but apparently her
influence was not powerful enough to protect them from accusations and punish-
ments.}

\footnote[80]{Marguerite de Navarre à Le Grant-Maistre, Anne de Montmorency,
(vers la fin de mai, 1550), Kermynard, Correspondance, II, 250-251 and n. 1.
There seems to be a relation between the date of Marguerite's request and
Oesclamadius' report to Zwingli on May 4, 1550, that Francis was actually
threatening Roussel, Lefèvre, and others for the influences which they had
exercised on his sister unless they could "dissuade her of what they had
persuaded her," Oesclamade à Ulric Zwingli, Éd. 4 mai, 1550, ibid., 249-
250. But cf. Genin who placed the date of Marguerite's letter to Montmorency
in the autumn of 1551, Lettres, 279-280.}
Since Marguerite was the protectress of "the persecuted" at Nérac, her religious ideas and relations with the reformers cannot be disassociated from a study of Lefèvre's later life. Already in 1528 Capiton congratulated her upon her arrival at the "full possession of faith in Jesus Christ" after believing in "vain practices and a false religious philosophy, and encouraged her to profit by the help of Arande, Roussel, and Lefèvre to persevere in her evangelical views. Capiton characterized the latter as:

cet aimable, sayant et pieux vieillard...doue l'esprit sérieux, tempéré par une sorte d'enjouement qui sied à son âge, traitée avec une grâce pleine de charmes, quand on l'y invite, les mystères de notre foi.

81 Doumegue holds that the whole canoe of Meaux was reconstituted there, Jean Calvin, I, 396. This is not exactly true, for Lefèvre was the only member of the Meaux "group" who actually resided at Nérac, although Arande was at nearby Dauphiny. We are not certain of Roussel's whereabouts during this period. Florimond de Raemond mentions that he was abbot at Clairac by 1534, Histoire de l'hérésie, II, 1261, 1372, but Lefrançais feels that he was still at Paris, Jeunesse de Calvin, 120, citing C. Schmidt, Gérard Roussel, 101. Doumegue further considers that the true glory of Nérac was not Henry IV but rather Marguerite. Under her guidance, he says, there escaped from it, "as from a flower, a delicious perfume of mysticism, at the same time penetrating and a little weak," Jean Calvin, I, 392. In this connection, however, it should be remembered that the real blending of heterodox influences at Nérac occurred just about the date of Lefèvre's death and in subsequent years. Clément Marot, for example, arrived in 1555, followed by Bonaventure Des Perriers, Antoine le Maçon, the translator of Boccaccio, and others, ibid., 395.

82 W. F. Capiton à Marguerite de Navarre, Strasbourg, 22 mars, 1528, Herminjard, Correspondance, II, 120-121. Apparently, Marguerite and Capiton had been corresponding for some time. He wrote to Calvin that "amici Galli" had requested him to dedicate to the Queen of Navarre his work on the prophet Hosea, (In Hoseam prophetam V. F. Capitonis Commentarius, 1528), W.-F. Capiton à Martiam Lucanum /Jean Calvin/, Strasbourg, (vers la fin de 1534), ibid., III, 490. Herminjard thinks "amici Galli" refers to Lefèvre, Arande, and Roussel, ibid., n. 8. Capiton told Farel that he was dedicating his Commentaries to the Queen of Navarre as he had promised Cornelius /Arande/, Wolfgang Capiton à Guillaume Farel, Strasbourg, (vers la fin de fevrier, 1528), ibid., II, 109, and the month after he informed Marguerite that he was making
Certain of Marguerite's religious views do appear unorthodox, but she had in common with Lefèvre a desire for the religion of mystical love he had proposed. With their Neoplatonic and mystical inclinations and their wish to "annihilate" themselves in the love of God, Marguerite, Lefèvre, Roussel, and others of the "group of Meaux" were far removed from the rationalistically-tinged Erasmus. While he and Lefèvre could remain friendly as humanists, Erasmus could never have been a member of the evangelic group the Frenchman headed. As early as 1525, Erasmus wrote two letters to Marguerite to win her favor, but she sent no reply. To her, he, as a humanist but not a mystic, remained in the apprenticeship of sacred studies. The Queen of Navarre's treatment of Erasmus formed a rather singular contrast to the good will she displayed toward Lefèvre. In her _Dernières poésies_, Marguerite the dedication to her as he had promised, _Capiton à Marguerite_, 22 mars, 1528, _ibid._, 121.

83 The Protestant Hauser discerns in the Queen from 1531 to 1535, the very years Lefèvre resided at Nérac, the point where the literary Renaissance and the religious Renaissance would soon separate. In her opinion, there was no enemy of the Gospel more treacherous than "le cuyder," not only in the sense that man is saved by his own merits but also in the general Renaissance ideal of man's confidence in himself. Hauser feels that Marguerite dreamed of a purified Platonic religion of which love would be the sole law, and that she conformed exteriorly to Catholic practices because she found them indifferent for the welfare of the soul. "De l'humanisme et de la réforme," _Rev. hist._, XLIV, 280-281 and n.1.

84 Mann, _Erasme_, 81.
I compared the two;

O que celluy qui a l'experience
Du Saint Esprit voit bien la difference
Des esrivains, car en ung purement
Trouve Celluy qui-Est tout clairement,
Qu'il peut juger l'esprit evangeliqve
Parler dedans ce docteur autantique.
En l'autre non, mais unq ouyder haultain
De trop savoir conduysant plume et main.

L'autre, duquel la doctrine si douteable,
C'est cestuy la qui l'homme enorguesillit,
Et qui l'excuses encore qu'il faillist,
En luy donnant pouvoir (sic), savoir, bonté,
Et que par luy peult bien estre dumpte
Le pêché joynet à nostre chair humaine,
Voire efface par son labeur et peymes...

Ces escriptz la, tant soient ils devots,
Bien paiszts, bien diots et remplis de beaulx motz,
Ils sont suspects et leurs doctrines aussy.85

There were four significant happenings during the years Lefèvre quietly passed in the shade of the Guruum. The first was recounted by Jerome Aléandre, the papal nuncio in Germany, long an enemy of Luther and a doubtful friend of Erasmus. Aléandre was told that a certain nobleman of Tournai had asked Lefèvre his opinions of Lutherans and Catholics. Lefèvre gave him no categoricanswer but said he thought best of those who acted under the influence of the Spirit of God. When the nobleman exclaimed that surely he believed that Catholics were so guided, Lefèvre, shrugging his shoulders, remarked "Je n'en sais rien." Aléandre admitted that he did not know what to make of these words.

85 Ibid., 72.
The really important part of the munio’s letter is his interpretation of Lefèvre’s views. In the main, Aleándre argued, his errors are of no great moment, although their novelty made them appear so at their first publication. At that time, to alter the least syllable of the Vulgate or even to amend a text corrupted by copyists was a thing unheard of. A new translation or a new version of the Bible, if it contained no false doctrine, was no longer in 1551 accounted any great affair, Aleándre felt. Both he and Clement VII wished to “soften Lefèvre and bring him back.” This reconciliation could be easily accomplished if Lefèvre would make but “a little retraction” of certain passages in his writings, even as St. Augustine did. But Aleándre noted that nothing would succeed so long as Lefèvre remained near Jean Gérard, and thought it best, for the effecting of this reconciliation, if he could be prevailed upon to come to Italy near the Roman authorities.

The significance of this letter lies in the admission of an ardent curialist that all along the censures passed against Lefèvre rested upon no solid doctrinal grounds, and in his testimony that the Pope felt similarly. Although only “a little retraction” was called for, Lefèvre never made this so far as we know.

86 "Jean Gérard" is obviously a mistake for Gérard Roussel, Herminjard, Correspondances, II, 388.

87 Jérôme Aléandre à Sanga, secrétaire de Clement VII, Bruxelles, 30 décembre, 1631, traduit de l’italien, ibid., 386-388.

88 Cf. the fact that Lefèvre’s French New Testament, published at Antwerp in September, 1528, was approved by Nicolas Copin, a theologian at Louvain whose orthodoxy was absolutely unimpeachable, ibid., 388, n. 10.
Prior to 1534, Lefèvre was mainly concerned with translating the Bible into the vernacular so that all Christians could read it. His first translation had faithfully followed the Vulgate, because he felt that he did not yet possess the learning necessary to criticize it textually. But in 1534 Martin Lempereur published at Antwerp "La Bible avec les variantes de l'hebreu et du grec," in which Lefèvre incorporated the marginal corrections which he had long been making on the original. This edition, like that of 1541, received the approbation of the doctors of Louvain and the privileges of Charles V, but, upon the demand of Philip II and the Duke of Alba, both editions were classified among the forbidden Bibles in the appendix of the Index of Forbidden Books of the Council of Trent.89

In April, 1534, the young John Calvin visited Marguerite's residence at Nérac. There he spoke of his plans for restoring the Church to its primitive purity and of his projected work, The Institutes of the Christian Religion. Calvin felt that it was necessary to "raze everything to build a new edifice." Roussel, with whom he seems to have come into contact,90 tried to convince him that it was necessary to "clean out the Church but not to destroy it," for, should the Church topple, in the end everything would be

---

89 Alfred Laune, La traduction de l'Ancien Testament de Lefèvre d'Étaples, 1895, 44-47, cited in Doumergue, Jean Calvin, I, 401.

90 Florimond de Raemond is our source for Calvin's visit to Nérac and his meeting with Lefèvre and Roussel, Histoire de l'hérésie, II, 1372-1373. Though Calvin either met Roussel there, at Clairac or at Paris, in any case, we are certain that Roussel was not permanently located at Nérac, cf. supra, 149, n. 61.
buried under its ruins. Lefèvre too tried to moderate Calvin's ambitions for reform by advising him to align his opinions with those of Melancthon.91

Lefèvre's advice to Calvin merits a special explanation for the light which it sheds on his own religious views. Although four years earlier, in 1530, Melancthon had drawn up the Augsburg Confession, the credo of Lutheranism, certain segments of Catholicism and Protestantism still hoped that

91 Doumercq summarized the views of Max Scheibe, a student of Calvin's life, and another German scholar, P. Kattenbusch, who wrote of the very definite evangelie influence of Lefèvre and his disciples, particularly Roussel, upon Calvin and the most characteristic points of his theology. Doumercq's own position seems somewhat contradictory, for he admits that the observations of Scheibe and Kattenbusch are "rather obscure" but himself says that from them may be drawn the conclusion that Lefèvre exerted a "remarkable influence" on Calvin at the very moment he first arrived at his evangelie convictions, Jean Calvin, I, 551. The evidence for such conclusions seems non-existent. Lefrans intimates that Lefèvre's general influence upon Calvin was of a mild, humanistic type, for already two years prior to their actual meeting, Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Lefèvre himself were his models rather than a Zwingli or a Luther. Even his earliest writings were full of erudition that was exclusively philological, Jeunesse de Calvin, 92; cf. Quintinus Breen, John Calvin: a Study in French Humanism, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1931. But Doumercq, following Theodore of Besa, finds real significance in the meeting of the two reformers. Besa jubilantly exclaimed, "ce bon vieillard vit de bon osil ce jeune homme, comme prującant que ce devoir être l'auteur de la restauration de l'Eglise en France," cited in Florimond de Raemond, Histoire de l'hérésie, II, 1872. Doumercq, always careful to distinguish between the "Protestantism" of Lefèvre and that of Calvin, sees in their meeting the blending of the two varieties: "Quel moment en effet que cette visite! Tout le passe de la Réforme française et tout son avenir! Le centenaire Le Fevre transmettant ses vœux, avec ses conseils, au jeune Calvin! la première période, celle du Fabrisme, qui se fermeit et la seconde, celle du Calvinisme, qui s'ouvrirait! Quelle chose comme la transmission d'un sceptre spirituel!, Jean Calvin, I, 402.
a reconciliation could be effected. To this end, between November, 1533, and
June, 1534, negotiations were in progress between Melanchthon, the representa-
tive of the moderate Protestant group, and Guillaume Du Bellay, the agent of
the French government to the German Protestant princes. While Du Bellay seems
to have made the first overture, Melanchthon was agreeable to working out a
compromise. He requested the French diplomat to exhort the European monarchs
to consent to a compromise quickly, lest many calamities and the ruin of Church
and State would ensue. 92 Even Rome showed itself ready to recognize some of
the more moderate demands of the reformers at this time. 93

The German's articles were somewhat indefinite. Although he would
allow the Pope to make all final decisions on disciplinary matters, he favored
the abolition of perpetual vows, marriage for religious, and the conversion
of monasteries into schools. Melanchthon saw no problem in the liturgy, since
it was indifferent in itself, and he would allow the retention of the doctrine
on tradition and auricular confession. He did not believe in invincible sin
but recognized the moral law, natural virtues and, to some degree, the worth
of works. He insisted that, though images could be retained, the saints must
not be invoked. Representatives of both sides knew that the Gordian knot
was the Mass and the Eucharist, on which Melanchthon's group seemed fully
Lutheran. This they would leave to a future "general council" to discuss. 94

92 Melanchthon to Du Bellay, August 1, 1534, Opera x, Bretschneider,
93 Amann, "Lefèvre d'Étaples," FTC, IX, 1, 154.
94 The summary of Melanchthon's articles is given in Imbart de la
Two years after the failure of these negotiations, Lefèvre died. Our last bit of information on him is extant in two slightly varying accounts. The first version was recounted by Marguerite and her husband to the Palatine Elector, Frederick II, and his minister, Hubert Thomas Leodius, in France in 1538. Farel is the author of the second account.

Leodius recorded the circumstances surrounding Lefèvre's death as follows. One day, during a dinner which Marguerite gave for the scholars in whose company she delighted, Lefèvre suddenly grew sad and began to weep. He inquired of the Queen how he could be gay and make others happy when he was the most culpable of all beings on earth. She, who always considered Lefèvre a very holy man, asked him what great crime he had committed. Amidst continuing tears, he replied that he had kept his virginity and had done nothing in his hundred and one years to make him now fear death, which he once had ardently desired, except one thing for which he hoped he could still atone. He had taught the Gospel of Christ purely and sincerely to many persons who followed its doctrine with constancy and for it endured a thousand torments.

---

Tour, Origines, III, 543-552, and Baird, Huguenots, I, 160-161; they are given verbatim in Bretschneider, Corpus Reformatorum, II, 744-766. Elector John Frederick felt that Melancthon's respect for Catholic ecclesiastical power would lead him to abandon all Protestant principles, Bretschneider, Corp. Ref., II, 913, cited in Baird, Huguenots, I, 184-186. A group inspired by Farel also tried to hinder these negotiations, while in France the notorious "affair of the placards" was organized to reawaken serious religious controversy, Imbert de la Tour, Origines, III, 562-568. Nor did the Sorbonne favor the plans for compromise which, of course, came to naught. Rome could never have acquiesced in some of the Protestant demands.
even death itself. Lefèvre explained that he, on the other hand, had fled without constancy and had shamefully abandoned God's commandments.

Neither Marguerite nor her guests could comfort Lefèvre, who desired only to make his will before he would die. He appointed the Queen his heir, but he willed his library to Roussel and his clothes to the poor. Laughingly, Marguerite remarked that his inheritance scarcely enriched her. He replied that he entrusted her with the care of dividing his remaining possessions among the poor. The Queen consoled him by saying that this inheritance pleased her more than would that of her brother, the king of France. Though Lefèvre gradually became reassured, he was very tired, lay down and fell asleep. Soon he was dead.95

The news of his last moments circulated among the reformers. Farel's letter to Arande on Lefèvre's death has perished, but the original memorandum in his handwriting, attached to Arande's reply, is extant. Farel wrote that Lefèvre, in his last days, greatly feared the judgment of God, continually stating that he had incurred eternal death for not having dared to confess the truth. When Roussel96 tried to console his friend and to help him place his confidence in Christ, Lefèvre repeated, "We are damned for not having professed the truth before men."

95 The Latin text is found in Hubert Thomas Leodium, Annalium de vita et rebus gestis...Friderici II libri XIV, Francfort, 1624, 229-230, cited in Amann, "Lefèvre d'Estaples," DFC, IX, 1, 154-155.

96 Farel's account indicates that Roussel, since 1535 the bishop of Oloron, was actually present at the deathbed of Lefèvre.
Farel wrote of the terror which he had experienced upon hearing the circumstances of Lefèvre's last moments. He counselled Arande that too mild a course in religion would lead to such plagues of conscience as Lefèvre had suffered on his deathbed.97 Arande feared also and begged Farel to pray for him and to continue his exhortations, so that finally he would be able to "extricate himself from the deep mire where he has no firm foundation to stand upon."98

Lefèvre was dead, and the majority of the "group of Meaux" were no longer active in religious reform. Like Roussel, Arande was a Catholic bishop, but also, life Lefèvre in his latter years, Arande discontinued neither his association with the radical reformers nor his rather vague statements on his religious allegiance.

97 The Latin text is in Herminjard, Correspondance, III, 400, mm. 6-7.

98 Michel d'Arande à Guillaume Farel, (St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux?, vers le mois de mars, 1556), ibid., 399-401.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

We have presented the basic facts in the historical record which cast some light on the religious mind of Lefèvre d'Étaples. Only our interpretation of them remains. We stressed that Lefèvre was mystically-inclined and that he valued the spirit of a thing more than its exterior expression. As a Christian humanist, he recognised that the failure to keep alive the spirit of philosophy, theology, and education was at the basis of their decadence. He wished to restore all three.

To this end, he contacted the Italian humanists, who were working to recover accurate Aristotelian and Platonic texts and to effect a synthesis of ancient philosophy with Catholic thought. Then, he and his aids used the techniques he had acquired to edit these works. Lefèvre was also in relations with the Northern humanist group, under the leadership of Erasmus, which felt that the religious spirit of early Christianity could be revived only in conjunction with intellectual reform and the return to a Bible based on the ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

As he became more skilled in the use of critical methods, Lefèvre moved gradually into the realm of religious writings. He first edited the early Christian writers, though his innate inclination for mysticism was early deepened, not only through his contact with Platonic works and those he recognised as Neoplatonic, but particularly from his intimate association...
with the works of the "divine Dionysius." Lefèvre's affinity for mystical theology and for the reform advocated by the Christian humanists was intensified still more through his contacts with the tradition of the Brethren of the Common Life and medieval mysticism, and by his familiarity with the thought of Ramon Lull, the Victorines, and Nicholas of Cusa. More and more, as he was led to the pinnacle of all studies, Scripture itself, he came to look for the profound meaning hidden beneath its words.

We noted that, from his first undertaking of Scriptural exegesis, his 1509 Psalter, Lefèvre determined to make evident the beauty of the Christian life, and to show, by magnifying the name of Christ, the Savior, that Holy Writ was of practical value for salvation.

In his Pauline Commentaries of 1512, this purpose was still more evident. Lefèvre there did not intend to express his doctrinal beliefs, but rather to exalt the spiritual elements in the Bible. While he emphasized the role of faith in man's justification and minimized the worth of works, he explained that God alone can justify. He believed that man has a free will and can cooperate with the grace of God. He realized the necessity of penances but cautioned against relegating these exterior practices to a place superior to a vibrant interior religious life. He recognized the value of the monastic life for persons called to that state. All these points were the antitheses of the Lutheran position. While Lefèvre's views on the Mass and the Eucharist seem somewhat vague, we have no real basis for holding that they were not truly Catholic. We observed, however, that his statement on Baptism can be interpreted as unorthodox in
a single aspect, his explanation that it was a "sign of justification."

In accord with his universalist tendencies, Lefèvre in 1512 deplored disunity in the Church of Christ.

When he wrote his second major work, his 1522 Commentaries on the Gospels, he was already engaged in effecting the Meaux plan for a reform within the Catholic fold. We emphasised the diversities of the members of the "group" gathered around Briçonnet, though, of course, the bishop and Roussel, like Lefèvre, were drawn to mysticism. Lefèvre's peculiar rôle in this reform was the continuation of his quiet and scholarly biblical work.

In his 1522 Commentaries, Lefèvre reiterated his views of 1512. He declared the existence of purgatory, and it seems that he objected not to the devotion to the saints but rather to the abuses connected with this practice. He added his belief in the divine institution of the sacrament of Penance, though he termed it one of the "symbolic evidences" of justification. In 1525, in his Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, Lefèvre appeared indefinite and maybe even unorthodox on the sacrament of Extreme Unction. We must admit that certain of his sacramental views at least seem to deviate from the tenets of Roman Catholicism.

Lefèvre continued to be interested in the general problem of reform, but, after 1522, his plans for religious reform predominated. It is easy to see how he was affected by the purely scientific aspects of Renaissance humanism and to understand his Christian humanistic aims. But the juncture at which these blended with more pronounced religious
reformist tendencies, if indeed they ever did, remains somewhat obscure. The reasons are many. In the frightful confusion which surrounded the first explosion of the Lutheran heresy, it was difficult for the moderate reformers, like Lefèvre, to make themselves heard. When they succeeded in doing so, the innovation-fearing Sorbonne immediately analyzed their position as "Lutheran." Even many persons sincerely desirous of a reform in Scholasticism and the religious system were unable to perceive the basic differences between Lutheranism, Sacramentarianism, and Lefèvre's attitudes on pivotal religious questions.

If the ideas of Lefèvre were hardly clear to his contemporaries, we should not be too critical of later Protestant writers who, perceiving in his works notions somewhat akin to their own, have claimed him as one of the earliest to espouse their principles. In this connection, however, it should be indicated that Lefèvre's exaltation of faith over works and of trust in God's goodness over reason, as well as his statements on reading Holy Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were similar to those of the early medieval and contemporary mystics. Further, as early as 1398, the suggestion had been made of translating the Vulgate into the vernacular for the benefit of the common folk. These ideas alone, then, cannot serve as proof that Lefèvre was a Protestant.

To sixteenth-century theologians like Bédier and Quercus, however, such notions appeared dangerous. While many views advanced by Lefèvre and the Christian humanists touched merely points of ecclesiastical discipline or criticism and not questions of dogma, the doctors of theology tended to
condemn categorically all these "innovations." On the one hand, these theologians were correct in holding that theology is a complex subject and that, unless only trained theologians would be allowed to explain it, real danger to the faith might ensue. On the other hand, the Christian humanists felt that, because they were adept in the use of critical techniques, they were sufficiently equipped to explain the Bible. Lefèvre himself was only a simple master of arts. Certainly, there was a middle ground between these opposing positions which, unfortunately, neither group would occupy.

It is true that, up to Lefèvre's time, theological questions were not defined with the exactitude that the Protestant Revolt made necessary. This, together with the fact that Lefèvre's purpose in his exegesis was not to explain doctrine, may serve to exonerate him from charges of infringing upon the province of the theologians and of making assertions contrary to the faith. We must admit, of course, that Lefèvre's often vague statements did lend themselves to varied interpretations and maybe even misinterpretation. They constitute, in fact, one of the very reasons for our inability to know exactly where he stood on dogma.

Admittedly, if we hold to Lefèvre's essential Catholicism, it is difficult to reconcile his associations with the radical evangelists of Switzerland and the Germanies and his words of praise for them. Nevertheless, we cannot assume on the sole basis of his associations with Farel, Bucer, Capiton, Oecolampadius, or Zwingli, that he was a Protestant. Nor can we hold this on the grounds of his advice to Calvin to align his
opinions to those of Melanchthon.

Our view of Lefèvre during the years of his semi-retirement at 
Nérac becomes little clearer. The nature of his scruples at his death is 
unknown. He may have lamented simply his lack of a more vigorous stand 
against the conservative theologians, or he may have grieved that he never 
openly espoused Protestantism. We cannot legitimately hold, considering 
the character of the extant evidence, that Lefèvre was definitely a 
Catholic in mind and heart in 1536. Nor can we conclude that he was but 
outwardly a member of the visible Church while he took refuge in specula-
tive mysticism.

Our study has shown that the thought of Lefèvre d'Estaples can 
be fathomed to its mystical depths, but that it cannot be systematised, 
and that his role in sixteenth-century religious reform cannot be deter-
mined precisely. For us, he must be the "mystical Christian humanist," 
at the time of his death in at least exterior conformity with Catholicism. 
His inner religious allegiance must remain an historical enigma.
1. PRIMARY SOURCES


Gémin, F., éd.. *Nouvelles lettres de la Reine de Navarre adressées au Roi François Ier*, Société de l’histoire de France, 1844.


Lalanne, Ludovic, éd.. *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris sous le règne de François Premier (1515-1533)*, Société de l’histoire de France, Paris, 1854.
A. BOOKS

Autin, Albert, L'Echec de la reforme en France au XVIe siecle, these presentee a la Faculte des lettres de Montpellier, Toulon, 1917.


Barraud, Jean, Etudes d'histoire religieuse, n.p., n.d. On the cover is stamped "Jacques Lefevre d'Estaples." The irregular pagination is due to the fact that this volume is composed of the author's articles in various periodicals.

Bevan, F., Vie de Guillaume Farel, Lausanne, 1885.

Breen, Quirinus, John Calvin: a Study in French Humanism, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1931.

Buisson, Ferdinand, Sebastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre (1515-1568), Paris, 1891.


Cassirer, Ernst, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, Chicago, 1948.


Douauche, A., L’Université de Paris et les Jesuites (XVIe et XVIIe siècles), Paris, 1883.


Feret, P., La Faculté de théologie de Paris et ses docteurs les plus célèbres, 2 t., Paris, 1900-1901.


Haag, Eugène et Émile, La France protestante, 2e éd., 6 t., Paris, 1877-1888.


Heubi, William, François Ier et le mouvement intellectuel en France (1515-1547), Lausanne, 1913.


Jourda, Pierre, Marguerite d'Angoulême, Duchesse d'Alençon, Reine de Navarre (1492-1549), t. I-IX de la Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance, 1930.


Lavisse, Ernest, and Alfred Rambaud, Histoire générale du IVe siècle à nos jours, t. IV, Paris, 1894.

Lefranç, Abel, Grands écrivains français de la Renaissance, Paris, 1914.

Lefranç, Abel, La jeunesse de Calvin, Paris, 1886.


Mann, Margaret, Erasme et les débuts de la réforme française (1517-1636), Paris, 1934.


B. ARTICLES


"Febvre (Jacques Fabri, ou le)." Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, ou Dictionnaire de tous les hommes qui se sont fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes, depuis le commencement du monde jusqu'à ce jour, nouv. éd., Bruxelles, IV, 1851, 219.


Viennot, John, "Ya-t-il une réforme française antérieure à Luther?," Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français, Paris, LXII, 1913, 97-106.


The thesis submitted by Rita Charlotte Kucera has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 15, 1955
Date

Signature of Adviser