

Religious Stalemate and Confessional Alignments: Dynamics and Stagnation in the Confederation from 1531 to 1618

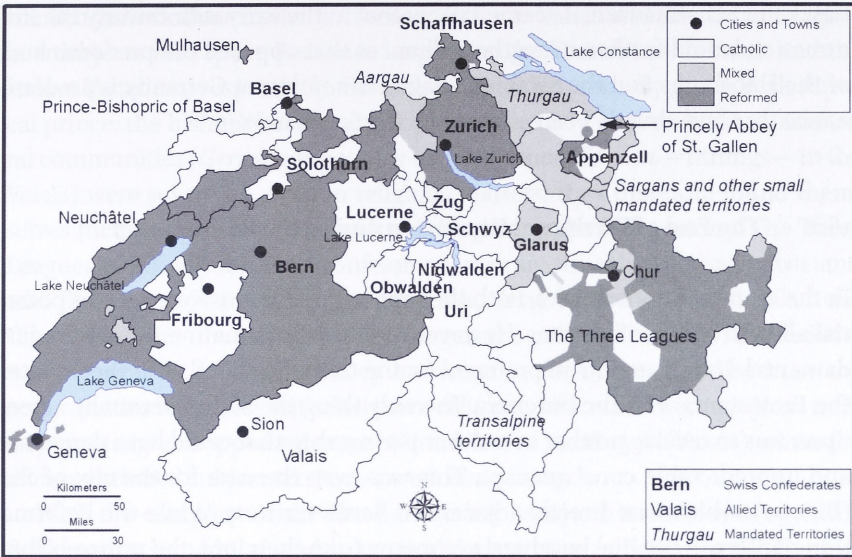
Thomas Maissen¹

16.1 Introduction

In 1513 Appenzell became the 13th full member of the Confederation.² Basel and Schaffhausen joined the Confederates, who had already proven their military prowess in the hinterland of these two imperial cities during the Swabian War of 1499, a decade earlier. It seemed it was only a matter of time until other associated district allies (*Zugewandte Orte*)—satellites of the League already

1 I am most grateful to Angela Roberts and also to Felicitas Eichhorn and Amy Burnett for their help in editing this paper in English.

2 For the political and religious structure of Switzerland in the 16th century, see Hans Berner, Ulrich Gäbler, and Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, "Schweiz," in *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung*, vol. 5: *Der Südwesten*, (eds.) Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (Münster: Aschendorff, 1993), 278–323. For the state of the art in Swiss historiography consult the articles in HLS, accessible in German, French, and Italian at <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/index.php>. Still useful for the factual history is Peter Stadler, "Das Zeitalter der Gegenreformation," in *Handbuch der Schweizer Geschichte*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Berichthaus, 1972), 1: 571–672; and for the constitutional history, see Hans Conrad Peyer, *Verfassungsgeschichte der alten Schweiz* (Zurich: Schulthess Polygraphischer Verlag, 1978). For religious and church history in general, see Pfister, KGS; Lukas Vischer and Rudolf Dellsperger (eds.), *Ökumenische Kirchengeschichte der Schweiz* (Fribourg: Paulus Verlag, 1998); Gordon, *Swiss Reformation*; recent scholarship is discussed in Thomas Maissen, "Konfessionskulturen in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft. Eine Einführung," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), 225–46; and André Holenstein, "Reformation und Konfessionalisierung in der Geschichtsforschung der Deutschschweiz," *ARG* 100 (2009), 65–87. For recent overviews in English, see Clive H. Church and Randolph C. Head, *A Concise History of Switzerland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 73–103, and the contributions of Andreas Würgler, "The League of Discordant Members' or How the Old Swiss Confederation Operated and How Has it Managed to Survive for so Long?," and Francisca Loetz, "Bridging the Gap: Confessionalisation in Switzerland," both in *The Republican Alternative. The Netherlands and Switzerland compared*, (eds.) André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen, and Maarten Prak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 29–50 and 75–97 respectively.



MAP 16.1 *Religious divisions within the Swiss Confederation in the 17th century*

from the 15th century—would become full members as well. The most likely of these associates to enter the league next was St. Gallen. At this time there were actually two St. Gallens: the city and the abbey. This schism in St. Gallen was made irremediable during the Reformation when the prince-abbot remained loyal to the Roman Church while the city followed the Protestant reformer Joachim Vadian. One motive for this choice can be ascribed to simple territorial ambitions: the burghers of the city, which still ended at the town wall, saw the Reformation as an opportunity to win a territory of their own if they could secularize the abbot's state that surrounded the city.³

St. Gallen's burghers embraced a rationale similar to that of many other cities in the Holy Roman Empire, among them Basel, Geneva, Chur, Constance, Strasbourg, and Augsburg; they followed the Protestant faith, among other reasons, to liberate themselves completely from their bishops who also acted as traditional secular lords. In St. Gallen's neighboring region of Allgäu, the imperial city of Kempten was able to purchase the sovereign rights from its own prince-abbot after the Peasants' War had weakened him considerably. Kempten subsequently formed a small territory and became a prominent representative of the early Reformation; it was among the first to sign the Augsburg Confession. Given the close ties that had been established by the Confederates in the preceding decades to urban and rural areas north of the Rhine such as

³ See Chapter 6 above.

Basel and Schaffhausen, it seemed likely that in the early 16th century the Reformation would further strengthen alliances that opposed the predominance of the Habsburgs and the Swabian League in southwest Germany, a predominance that had already been affected by the Swabian War.

16.2 The End of Territorial Expansion during the Reformation

In the aforementioned cases, both the prelate and his city were seen as potential allies of the Confederates. However, after the Reformation there were fundamental disagreements in preferences: the Catholics sided with the prelates, the Protestants with the burghers. The only thing the Swiss eventually agreed upon was to receive neither in a closer partnership that could have dangerous and unpredictable consequences. This was even the case for the city of Biel (Bienna), which was directly adjacent to Bern's territory. While the Reformation reinforced the Biel burghers' autonomy from their lord, the prince-bishop of Basel, their Protestant creed also meant that they could not strengthen relations with the Confederation because the Catholic cantons formed the majority and resisted an increase in the number of their religious opponents. Still, Biel retained a particular alliance (*Burgrecht* or *combourgeoisie*, granting citizenship to non-residents) with Protestant Bern and with the Catholic cantons of Solothurn and Fribourg; it was also a regular guest at the Confederal Diet.

Such visits to the Diet became rare in the case of Rottweil in Swabia and Mulhouse (Mülhausen) in Alsace, two allies who, despite their distance from the Confederation's territories, had participated in several military campaigns and had entered into formal treaties with the Confederation by 1463 (Rottweil) and 1515 (Mulhouse). Rottweil remained Catholic because, inter alia, it housed an imperial court of law (*Hofgericht*). However, even the Catholic cantons detached themselves from the exposed Rottweil during the Thirty Years' War, whereas Mulhouse, after joining the Reformed in 1528 and not least because of its strong contacts with neighboring Basel, managed to remain an ally of the Protestant cantons until 1798, when it was integrated into revolutionary France. By the early 16th century, the Confederates had severed their links to other external territories that were sometimes labeled *Zugewandte* in the preceding century, including the Duchy of Württemberg, the counties of Montbéliard and Arona, and the imperial city of Besançon.

Among the irregular guests of the Diet there were also two other confederations whose constitutions were similar to the Swiss: the Valais (Wallis) and the Three Leagues of Graubünden (the Grisons)—namely, the Grey League in the west, the League of God's House in the south and east, and the League of

the Ten Jurisdictions in the northeast. Both the Valais and the Three Leagues had subjects who spoke Romance languages: the French Lower Valais and the Italian Valtellina, respectively. Both also depended formally on an ecclesiastical prince: the bishops of Sion and Chur, respectively. However, the mostly rural communities (*Gerichtsgemeinden* in the Grisons, *Zenden*—tithings—in the Valais) were sovereign, even in religious matters; they therefore found themselves increasingly split by religious strife during the 16th century. The Three Leagues eventually formed a confessional rag rug while the Valaisan patricians, who flirted with Protestantism around 1600, later turned back to the Catholic Church. In spite of comparable challenges, the political bonds with the Swiss were, in general, looser than they had been in the 15th century because the communities were busy with their own religious affairs and because joint military campaigns stopped after 1512 (Graubünden) and 1536 (Valais) when the aforementioned subject territories were conquered.⁴

With the conquest of the Vaud and other Savoyard territories in 1536, the Reformation brought an end to territorial expansion not only for the Confederation but also for its allies. Together they formed a shape that is similar to present-day Switzerland and demonstrates unusual territorial continuity. The Confederation in its strict sense remained, until 1798, within the “natural” borders formed by the thirteen full members, the cantons between the Rhine, the Jura, and the ridge of the Alps.

16.3 The Option of a Reformed Alliance in Southwest Germany

In the 1520s the situation was quite different. The German Peasants’ War of 1525 was often inspired by a desire to “turn Swiss,” a lure that was particularly attractive to rural communes that sought to follow the model of Schwyz or Appenzell, where those in rural areas lived free from princely, noble, or urban rule.⁵ However, it is important to note that the Swiss authorities usually did not foster social unrest in their own neighborhood for the obvious reason that it could harm them. The cities, and their elites in particular, depended on a system of soccage, and serfs still existed in several places including Zurich. Facing social unrest in its own rural territories in the form of Anabaptism, among others, and very isolated within the Confederation between 1523 and 1527, Zurich

4 *Bündner Geschichte*, vol. 2: *Frühe Neuzeit*, (eds.) Jürg Simonett, Roger Sablonier, and Georg Jäger (Chur: Verlag Bündner Monatsblatt, 2000); see also Chapters 7 and 8 above.

5 Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire, 1450–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

did not limit its search for religious alliances (*Christliches Burgrecht*, hence a *combourgeoisie* among fellow Christians) to the regular Confederates. Its first ally in faith was Constance in 1527. Eventually, Zurich's most important ally would become Bern. It entered into a *Burgrecht* in 1528, as did the city of St. Gallen; Basel, Schaffhausen, Biel, and Mulhouse followed in 1529 and Strasbourg in 1530. In the same year, Zurich signed a treaty with Philipp I, Landgrave of Hesse, the Protestant leader who tried in vain to reconcile Zwingli and Luther in Marburg in 1529. Zurich also supported the Protestant Duke of Württemberg, Ulrich, whom the emperor had banned in 1519 and whom Philipp of Hesse managed to restore to power in 1534.

Like these princes, the cities in the southwest were closely tied to Zwingli's memorialism in the Lord's Supper and often formed their church ordinances according to the model established in Zurich. Several cities tried to establish a middle ground between Zurich and Wittenberg. With this aim, and supported by Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau, Strasbourg's reformers, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, penned the Tetrapolitan Confession in 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg. The First Helvetic Confession (*Confessio Helvetica Prior*), written by Bullinger and the leading reformers of Bern, Basel, and Zurich in 1536, met with the approval of Bucer and Capito, at least in the Latin version; Leo Jud's German translation was more unambiguously Zwinglian. Later in the same year Bucer and Capito also signed the Wittenberg Concord with Luther, who remained very hostile to the Swiss "spiritualists" whom he held responsible for fostering religious and social unrest. Bullinger had equally negative feelings about his adversary in Wittenberg, especially after Luther refused a Zurich Bible that was offered to him as a gift in 1543. By that time Upper Germany had slowly moved towards Lutheranism by accepting the Wittenberg Concord. This was reflected in the Duke of Württemberg's dismissal of Ambrosius Blarer, the Zwinglian reformer of Constance whom he had employed to reform the University of Tübingen, in 1538.

Although the Lutherans eventually prevailed, for more than two decades Upper Swabia, from Constance and Kempten down to Ulm and Augsburg, remained open to Zwinglian theology and to ministers from Zurich who continued to influence both the pastors and secular authorities.⁶ It seemed a distinct possibility that the Swiss "large league of lands in Upper Germany" (*großer Pund obertütscher Landen*) could become a vast federation centered around Lake Constance. This was a development that could still be imagined within the encompassing framework of the Holy Roman Empire. The Swiss cantons

6 Peer Friess, "Der Einfluss des Zwinglianismus auf die Reformation der oberschwäbischen Reichsstädte," *Zwingliana* 34 (2007), 5–27.

had not adopted the imperial reforms of 1495, but they always acknowledged the emperor and Empire as the legal origin of their political power and asked newly elected emperors to confirm the privileges that granted their dominion. The political constitution of the cities, often dominated by the guilds, and their political aims, such as social control by means of marital courts, were very similar in Swabia and Switzerland. Furthermore, the economic interdependence and commercial ties—for example in grain trade—between these areas was very strong.

Constance, Zurich's ally in the first *Christliches Burgrecht*, was not only eager to inherit the territories of the prince-bishop of Constance, who left for Meersburg in 1527; it also aspired at winning the Thurgau, which formed its natural hinterland but had become a mandated territory (*Gemeine Herrschaft*) of seven cantons in 1460. Of these Zurich was the closest and the strongest. The six other lords—Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, and Glarus—were almost all firm Catholics and lived in constant fear that Zurich would hand over the common territory to Constance in order to establish a vast Reformed network. Indeed, since Constance was situated on the left bank of the Rhine it was not inconceivable that it should seek to fulfill the old dream of many of its burghers and join the Confederation, as neighboring Schaffhausen, located on the right side of the Rhine, had done in 1501. Such changes would have undermined and possibly overstretched the defensive alliance that protected the autonomy of the small cantons in central Switzerland. They would also have threatened Habsburg possessions in Swabia, including the districts (*Oberamt*) of Stockach and Aldorf and could have potentially formed a wedge between Austria and its *Vorlande* in Alsace and the Breisgau. Since the Confederates, though still members of the Holy Roman Empire, were almost autonomous in their foreign and military policy and since their mercenaries regularly fought for France, a development along these lines would have been seen as a threat to the Empire as a whole and in particular to the Austrian and Swabian circles.

16.4 The Reaction of the Catholic Cantons in Central Switzerland

This perspective met with opposition from Zurich's allies in central Switzerland who insisted on the common historical tradition and shared rules both with a religious and a political perspective. In the *Christliche Burgrechte*, Zurich had left out the usual proviso of its Swiss Confederates. Its new religious alliances announced a radically changed Confederation that would be characterized by Reformed faith and dominated by the cities, notably by Zurich and Bern.

A large league of Protestant towns in the Swiss plateau and Swabia would have reduced the Catholic cantons to peripheral actors in every sense. This fear led to a kind of *renversement des alliances* when the Catholic cantons drew closer to the house of Habsburg: Lucerne and the inner cantons had always been the fiercest opponents of this “arch enemy,” whereas Zurich, in spite of its Swiss obligations, had often acted as a Habsburg partner or at least mediator in the 15th century. This was certainly true during the *Erbeinung*, the permanent peace contracted in 1477 and renewed in 1511 as well as in 1519, when Zurich became the leading supporter of Charles v’s claim for the imperial crown, and in 1521, when it rejected the alliance with France. It is telling that it was the prince-bishop of Constance who brokered the *Christliche Vereinigung* of 1529, a pact between Archduke Ferdinand I, the brother of Charles v, and the *Fünf Orte*, the five cantons in central Switzerland—Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, and Zug.⁷ The political opposition between the ecclesiastical prince and the city of Constance was clearly reflected in the religious decisions and the respective foreign alliances made at the time.

If Zurich and Bern had won the War of Kappel in 1531, Zwingli would have continued his missionary policy of establishing a large network of Reformed partners in Southern Germany. His defeat relegated the Swiss to their own territories: not only did Zurich, now weakened, have to curtail its expansionism, but the Catholic cantons also broke off their unnatural alliance with the Habsburgs after Ferdinand I neglected to help them during the war. The Peace of Kappel (*Zweiter Kappeler Landfrieden*) stipulated that both the Protestants and the Catholics dismiss their recent confessional alliances, which were seen as contrary to the Confederates’ past sworn treaties. This was particularly hard for Zwinglian Constance, which until Kappel had aspired to full membership in the Confederation, or at least to the status of a *Zugewandter Ort*; the Catholic cantons now vetoed the promotion. By establishing, for the first time in history, the principle that would later be called *cuius regio, eius religio*, the Swiss resigned themselves to a Confederation that accommodated religious plurality, half-heartedly preferring this to a continuing war over true religion that could be decided only with help from foreign allies. In spite of the many crises that were to come, the confessional parties felt relatively secure in maintaining this shaky equilibrium. The Protestant cities of Zurich, Bern, Basel, and Schaffhausen, together with their allies in Glarus, Appenzell, and some *Zugewandte*, were economically strong, demographically superior,

7 Bettina Braun, *Die Eidgenossen, das Reich und das politische System Karls v* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997), 311–41.



FIGURE 16.1 *Meeting of the Confederal Diet in Baden, 1531, from Andreas Ryff, Cirkell der Eidtgnoschaft (1597)*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSÉE HISTORIQUE MULHOUSE

and militarily powerful. But they had lost in Kappel against the deeply committed *Fünf Orte*—Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, and Zug—which could count on support from Fribourg, Solothurn, a part of Glarus and Appenzell, and important *Zugewandte*, especially the ecclesiastical princes; they could also hope for support from the powerful Catholic monarchs in the neighborhood.

The Peace of Kappel did not set aside religious strife, least of all in the mandated territories (*Gemeine Herrschaften*) where dominion, the *regio*, belonged to lords of different faiths. But in spite of its initial provisional character, the second Peace of Kappel managed to politicize metaphysical questions by defining the *status quo ante* and guaranteeing clear border lines, by prohibiting religious slander and provocations, and by neutralizing conflict zones, in particular the bridgehead areas for alliances with German partners—Aargau, Thurgau, and St. Gallen. The mandated territories were administered alternately and thus most of the time by a bailiff from a Catholic canton. In the mandated territories, the Protestant subjects were free to keep their faith or to convert if they wanted, while the Catholics were no longer permitted to convert. This entangled coexistence could sometimes be very difficult, particularly

in Thurgau, where, for example, the two confessions sometimes had to share the single church of a village in a so-called *simultaneum*.⁸ The Toggenburg, Zwingli's native region, had to acknowledge again the abbot of St. Gallen as its overlord, though the valley was to a large extent Protestant. After Kappel, the rural subjects of Zurich complained about the losses and peacefully revolted in order to avoid suffering further as victims in religious wars. They also insisted that the councils not only keep the ministers away from political decisions but also that they distance themselves from the Swabians.⁹ The peasants did not want to have to pay the bloody price for a religious and foreign policy that served the political and religious needs of the city a second time.

16.5 The Missing Common Ground

In spite of its fragility, the new post-Reformation structure of the Confederation, settled in 1531, was crucial for perpetuating an internal equilibrium and in keeping the country out of international conflicts until 1798. This was the case, however, only as regards the Confederation as a "state," because hundreds of thousands of Swiss mercenaries fought on foreign battlefields both in Europe and overseas. The Confederation as a whole, utterly divided in itself and lacking a common authority, was unable to practice foreign policy in an age where alliances followed confessional lines and where new military technologies—especially firearms—and changed strategies asked for clear and unique military leadership. The Swiss cantons, which had already followed differing aims during the Italian Wars of the early 16th century, could never have agreed on a territorial direction for expansion or on a common partner.

The only eventual exception to this was France. The alliance of 1521 granted the French king up to 16,000 Swiss mercenaries, and from 1530 onwards a French ambassador resided permanently in Solothurn and influenced Swiss politics through advice and pensions. Still, after Zwingli preached against the immoral mercenaries and "pensioners" (receiving bribes) who exported death

8 Frauke Volkland, *Konfession und Selbstverständnis. Reformierte Rituale in der gemischtkonfessionellen Kleinstadt Bischofszell im 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Randolph C. Head, "Shared Lordships, Authority, and Administration. The Exercise of Dominion in the Gemeine Herrschaften, 1417–1600," *Central European History* 30 (1997), 489–512; Randolph C. Head, "Fragmented Dominion, Fragmented Churches. The Institutionalization of the Landfrieden in the Thurgau, 1531–1610," *ARG* 96 (2005), 117–44. For additional literature see Maissen, "Konfessionskulturen," 231–2.

9 For the revolt, see Bächtold, *Bullinger vor dem Rat*, 15–29. See also Chapter 2 above, 91–2.

to others and imported the subversive luxury of princes and noblemen to their own country, Zurich (in 1521) and Bern (in 1529) decided to abstain from the French alliance. Thus, the two most important Protestant cantons did not participate in the French alliance until 1564 (Bern) and 1614 (Zurich). By then France, and in particular Henry IV, had gained a reputation as a reliable arbiter in internal conflicts. Through the 16th century, the French sought to avoid any turmoil in Switzerland that would impede the recruitment of soldiers or open the neighboring flank to a hostile intervention from Austria. The French alliance was the only “institution,” besides the Confederal Diet, that eventually included all the cantons and thus gradually replaced the Holy Roman Empire as a constitutional framework. In the 16th century the Swiss no longer visited imperial Diets and slowly moved toward exemption from the imperial chamber court in Speyer, a privilege that was granted to them in 1648 as part of the Peace of Westphalia and was later interpreted as sovereignty.

It is important to remember that there was no constitutional contract uniting all the cantons. The Confederation was a network of alliances with specific “eternal” pacts (*Bundesbriefe*) between some members, but it lacked a unitary structure. Until the Reformation, the regular ritual of delegates confirming the pacts by oath every fifth year had been extremely important. The German name *Eidgenossenschaft* made clear that this was a commonwealth that relied on the shared oath (*Eid*). And it was precisely this oath that became impossible after 1526, when Protestant Zurich refused to utter the reference to the saints that was part of the traditional formula. Furthermore, because Zurich was the presiding canton (*Vorort*) of the Confederation, according to the protocol it had to pronounce the oath before the others. If Zurich abstained from this duty the metaphysical basis for the Confederation was lost and, as there was no real institutional backing, this meant that little was left over of the Confederation itself. This explains why Basel, for example, fearing a Habsburg intervention, suggested a reiteration of the common oath in 1543, as did the French king Henry II when he tried to unite the cantons against Charles V in 1548—these attempts failed.¹⁰ The alienation was not limited to a symbolic level: the less the Confederates communicated with one another, the less they knew about each other and the higher was the risk of dangerous misunderstandings and misinterpretations of each other’s intentions.¹¹

10 Hans-Ulrich Bächtold, “Das uns gott helff und die heiligen’: Zürich im Streit um die eidgenössische Schwurformel,” in Campi FS, 295–346.

11 Thomas Lau, “Der Konfessionskonflikt als Kommunikationsproblem—die Alte Eidgenossenschaft zwischen 1531 und 1712,” in *Karl Borromäus und die katholische Reform*, (eds.) Mariano Delgado and Markus Ries (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2010), 28–40.

Confessional differences created eternal debates at the Swiss Diet, not least over many practical questions.¹² Any local conflict could potentially become an issue for the whole Confederation to fight over if it was brought into the dichotomies of religious controversy.¹³ Luckily for the continuation of the Confederation, however, confessional antagonism followed dividing lines other than the formerly constitutive difference between the urban and rural cantons. In 1481, after the so-called Sow-banner campaign (*Saubannerzug*), the *Stanser Verkommnis* had put only a provisional end to the conflicts characterized by this predetermined breaking point. Zurich and Schwyz represented the two camps and were the main antagonists throughout the 15th century. It was no coincidence that they opposed each other again in the confessional age, but it was decisive that henceforth Lucerne, Solothurn, and Fribourg sided not with their fellow patricians in Bern and the other cities, but with Schwyz and the other rural cantons of central Switzerland to form a league of burghers and countrymen. Likewise, Zurich found its religious allies among the peasants of Glarus, Appenzell (to become Appenzell-Außerrhoden), the Toggenburg, and the Grisons. These religious ties were strong, but they did not completely cover the structural and political differences between urban and rural cantons within both camps. Further heterogeneity stemmed from traditional rivalries, like the one between Zurich and Bern, which were exacerbated by theological differences, especially in the 1540s.

16.6 Shared Interests and Joint Enterprises

On the other hand, many cantons shared interests that transcended their religious differences, such as the control of epidemics or the trade of grain, salt, and mercenaries with neighboring states and major powers. The existence and survival of the Confederation depended on the cantons' commonalities, if they wanted to continue their defensive alliance of petty republics located between the mighty princes of Austria, Milan, and France and in order to act as a collective lord over the territories they had conquered together. The mandated territories thus formed a syndicate, particularly between the small Catholic

12 Andreas Würigler, *Die Tagsatzung der Eidgenossen. Politik, Kommunikation und Symbolik einer repräsentativen Institution im europäischen Kontext 1470–1798* (Epfendorf: Biblioteca academica, 2013).

13 Ulrich Pfister, "Konfessionskonflikte in der frühneuzeitlichen Schweiz. Eine strukturalistische Interpretation," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), 257–312.

cantons and Zurich. The former depended on and profited most from revenues and offices, whereas Zurich was closely interconnected with the surrounding mandated territories in the Aargau (Baden, the *Freie Ämter*), Sargans, the lower Rheintal, and the Thurgau.

In general, and in spite of their differing beliefs, urban, rural, and even princely authorities faced similar challenges and threats as lords of unprivileged subjects. The often fragmented and intersected territories made arrangements between the different cantons unavoidable: for example, who could share jurisdictional rights? Peaceful solutions, prepared by negotiations and tedious bargaining, compromise, and even compliance, were usually the better option for maintaining stability than the intervention of dangerous foreign powers.¹⁴ Therefore, Basel was not the only Confederate that relied on the arbitration of its fellow Confederates and aimed at “good correspondence” in its relations with a Catholic neighbor, in this case the prince-bishop residing in Porrentruy (Pruntrut), who in turn depended economically and financially on the free city. Even when there was an opportunity to encourage Reformation after the bishop’s death in 1553, Basel did not attempt it. For his part, the prince-bishop generally tolerated the Reformed subjects who lived in the southern region of his territories, and although he once threatened to change this policy in 1579, the Reformed cantons were successful in deterring him from taking this step.¹⁵

Bern proved the continuity of strategic commonalities in the most obvious way during the campaign against Savoy that it led with its traditional ally Fribourg in the 1530s.¹⁶ The drive westward had led to an alliance between the two towns in the 15th century, especially during the Burgundian Wars, when they conquered territories that they then ruled jointly. While still engaged in the Italian Wars, the Confederates temporarily, from 1512 to 1529, occupied the county of Neuchâtel and administered it through bailiffs. Thanks to this situation, Bern began a policy of reforming francophone territories by supporting Guillaume Farel from the Dauphiné, a follower of Zwingli and Bucer who won

14 See Daniela Hacke, “Zwischen Konflikt und Konsens. Zur politischen konfessionellen Kultur in der Alten Eidgenossenschaft des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 32 (2005), 575–604; on the culture of conflict, see also Andreas Würzler, “Aushandeln statt Prozessieren. Zur Konfliktkultur der alten Eidgenossenschaft im Vergleich mit Frankreich und dem Deutschen Reich (1500–1800),” *Traverse* (2001/3), 25–38, and Thomas Maissen, “Disputatio de Helvetiis an natura consentiant. Frühneuzeitliche Annäherungen an die Schweizer Konsensbereitschaft,” *Traverse* (2001/3), 39–55.

15 Hans Berner, “Die gute Correspondenz.” *Die Politik der Stadt Basel gegenüber dem Fürst-Bisum Basel 1525–85* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1989), 97–102.

16 See also Chapters 3 and 9 above.

Neuchâtel over to the Protestant side in 1530. A printing press was installed shortly thereafter that enabled the first francophone Protestants to spread their written message in French, something that would have been impossible in France. Farel also preached in Biel and in the adjacent southern, francophone territories of the prince-bishop of Basel, which, under the protection of Bern, partly passed over to the new faith. Farel then went on to the Vaud, which belonged to the duke of Savoy but had already come under Bern's influence; he was joined there by a native son of the area, Pierre Viret. They both went on to proselytize in Geneva, an episcopal town that aspired to the status of an imperial city but lay isolated within the territories of the duke of Savoy, who installed a member of his family as the bishop of Geneva. In 1533 the burghers of Geneva finally expelled the bishop.

In the subsequent conflict, Geneva's search for independence from its overlord and from Savoy and the growing influence of Protestant preachers met with the expansionist tendencies of the alliance between Protestant Bern and Catholic Fribourg. Since 1526 a *combourgeoisie* had united them with Geneva, and in 1530 the two cantons occupied Geneva in order to protect it from the aggressions of the Savoyard nobility. In 1536 they not only backed the city against the duke, but also conquered the Savoyard Vaud and the prince-bishopric of Lausanne without meeting with much resistance. After a disputation in Lausanne, these territories soon passed over to the Protestant faith. Furthermore, Bern occupied the Pays de Gex around Geneva and the Western Chablais to the south of Lake Geneva, while its other Catholic allies, the Valaisans, advanced to occupy the eastern part of the Chablais. After Bern had weakened its long-time antagonist in this area, the French king Francis I completed the duke's defeat and occupied almost all of the remaining Savoy.

16.7 The Reformed Closing of Ranks between Zurich and Geneva

Bern aspired to incorporate Geneva into its own territory as it had done with the other former episcopal see, Lausanne. However, the Genevans did not wish to exchange the frying pan for the fire; instead they opted to inherit the bishop's overlordship and thus win their independence. This would become decisive for the further development both of the Reformed Confession and the Confederation when Farel invited Jean Calvin to Geneva. Calvin stayed there from 1536 to 1538 and definitely established himself in 1541. In the long run, his preaching formed the basis for the emancipation of the *Welsche* who spoke Romance languages. The *Große Pund obertütscher Landen* was decidedly German-speaking, as the elites of Fribourg had abandoned the French language

when they joined the Confederation. The Italian speakers in the Ticino were the cantons' subjects, just as those in the Valtellina were in the Grisons. Likewise, in the allied Valais the German-speaking eastern part of the valley had equally subdued the lower, western part that was francophone. Neuchâtel would eventually become a princely ally of its own but, as previously mentioned, it remained occupied by the Confederates until 1529. Likewise, the Vaud, a former subject of Savoy, was now the subject of Bern. Although it lacked a territory, tiny Geneva was a notable exception among these French-speaking dominions. It soon made up for its lack of territory through the international reputation earned by Calvin and the academy that was founded in 1559, which attracted some thousand international students in the following century.¹⁷ Although Geneva could deal almost *pari passu* with Bern, the biggest and most powerful republic north of the Alps, the original Genevan elites paid a considerable price for this privilege. Many of them opposed Calvin and were later forced to emigrate, and some were even put to death. They were replaced by well-trained and skilled Calvinists, who acquired Genevan citizenship after fleeing from France, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Jean Calvin was born in 1509 in the Picardy and had little in common with the Toggenburger Zwingli who was 25 years his senior and already dead by the time Calvin was introduced to Protestantism. Unlike the Zurichers, Calvin had no animosity towards Luther, whose theological insights he largely shared, and he collaborated closely with Melancthon. On the other hand, Calvin regularly contested the political authorities of Bern and their state-church Zwinglianism. His presbyterial model of church discipline organized in the parish was distinctly different from Zwingli's. On theological grounds, the doctrine of double predestination also caused disputes.¹⁸ The area of the Vaud was a particular battleground for the different ecclesiological and theological concepts of Zwinglianism and Calvinism.

17 There is an abundance of literature on the international influence of Calvinism. An ongoing bibliography is published annually in the *Calvin Theological Journal*. For a recent recapitulation see Ansgar Reiss and Sabine Witt, (eds.), *Calvinismus. Die Reformierten in Deutschland und Europa. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums Berlin und der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden (1. April bis 19. Juli 2009)* (Dresden: Sandstein, 2009); Heinz Schilling, "Calvin und Calvinismus in europageschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Calvin und Reformiertentum in Ungarn und Siebenbürgen. Helvetisches Bekenntnis, Ethnie und Politik vom 16. Jahrhundert bis 1918*, (eds.) Márta Fata and Anton Schindling (Münster: Aschendorff, 2010): 1–21.

18 Guggisberg, *Bern KG*, 55–242; Emidio Campi, "Calvin, the Swiss Reformed Churches, and the European Reformation," in *Calvin and His Influence, 1509–2009*, (eds.) Irena Backus and Philipp Benedict (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2011), 119–43, here at 119–21; see also Chapter 9 above.

The political turnaround of 1547/48 in Germany was decisive for bringing Calvin and Geneva closer to the Swiss German Reformation.¹⁹ In 1547, Charles v defeated the Schmalkaldic League of the Lutherans. Its prominent members were, besides princes like the two leaders John Frederick I of Saxony and Philip I of Hesse, the imperial cities of the southwest, from Strasbourg to Augsburg and from Lindau to Ulm. The victorious emperor forced new, conservative constitutions onto these towns. He ordered a religious decree, the Augsburg Interim, which imposed traditional Catholic beliefs and practices with two exceptions: priests did not need to be celibate and the flock could receive both the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. While most territories and cities submitted to the Interim, Constance did not. Ambrosius Blarer and the council hoped that their Zwinglian associates would help them against the emperor. But when Charles v besieged the city and conquered it in 1548, the Protestant Swiss bowed to the fierce opposition of Lucerne and abstained from intervening. The Catholics wanted to avoid entanglement in the German conflict and in any ensuing civil war. They feared that the Reformed cantons, as imperial cities, would reintegrate into the Holy Roman Empire if they lost the war, and if they won that the Catholics would ask the emperor to intervene. Whatever happened, the Confederates would lose and the Habsburgs would win.²⁰ Still, not just the Protestants, particularly in Bern, but also some Catholic politicians like Aegidius Tschudi from Glarus warned that Constance, situated on the left bank of the Rhine, might become a Habsburg bridgehead to Swiss territory. Indeed, Constance lost its status as an imperial city and was reduced to an Austrian mediate town and re-catholicized. The Zwinglian ministers who had been preaching in cities such as Strasbourg, Ulm, and Augsburg had to follow Constance's Ambrosius Blarer and beat a retreat to Switzerland. They were not even reinstated when German Protestants freed themselves from the Interim after 1552. Southern Germany now definitely and solidly became Lutheran, and the Rhine emerged as a religious borderline between the two evangelical traditions.

Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's very well-informed successor as church leader (*Antistes*) of Zurich, observed the dangerous developments of 1547/48 very closely. Charles's momentary triumph menaced the Reformed movement as much as it threatened the Confederation itself—the Thurgau hinterland of Constance was just one of many former Habsburg territories in Switzerland

19 Thomas Maissen, "Die Eidgenossen und das Augsburger Interim. Zu einem unbekanntem Gutachten Heinrich Bullingers," in *Das Interim 1548/50. Herrschaftskrise und Glaubenskonflikt*, (ed.) Luise Schorn-Schütte (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 76–104.

20 Lau, *Der Konfessionskonflikt*, 30.

that the Habsburg emperor might attempt to reclaim. A renewed Duchy of Swabia seemed a possibility that could reach far south of Lake Constance under a Habsburg prince. For this reason the Catholic cantons, even though they refused to countenance help for Zwinglian Constance, made it clear that they would respect the auxiliary promises of the old treaties and defend their liberty together with the Confederates of the other faith.

The crisis of 1547/48 not only strengthened the shattered ties among the Confederates but also created new ones between Zurich and Geneva. Bullinger and Calvin were both severe critics of the *Interim* and of those Lutherans, like Melancthon, whom they suspected of giving in to imperial pressure. Calvin came to Zurich with Farel on Whitsun in 1548 and discovered that Bullinger's ideas of the Lord's Supper did not conflict with his own conviction. In 1549 the three Reformers signed the *Consensus Tigurinus*, which settled their differences concerning the Lord's Supper.²¹ Eventually, after the Synod of Dordrecht (1618/19), this would become the basis for the union of the Reformed on a universal level, but for the moment it mattered most in the context of the Confederation. It is particularly significant that not only Schaffhausen, St. Gallen, Neuchâtel, the Grisons, and Mulhouse accepted the *Consensus* but also, in 1551, the Bernese, although they felt offended by being out-manuevered and went on in various quarrels with Calvin over different issues.²²

Johannes Haller and Wolfgang Musculus were two ministers in Bern who played a decisive role in this closer union of the Reformed.²³ They had both been pastors in Augsburg until they had to flee the emperor and the *Interim* and thus were convinced followers of the Zwinglian model. Haller contributed significantly to the fall of Simon Sulzer, the pastor of Bern's Minster, who had successfully beaten his Zwinglian opponent Kaspar Megander back to Zurich in 1538 before trying to bring Bern's church closer to Luther and especially to Bucer. However, Sulzer was deposed and had to leave the city too; he went to Basel in 1548 where he became Antistes five years later.²⁴ Thus, it came as

21 *Cons Tig*; Gordon, *Calvin*, 179–80 and 204–9; Chapter 2 above.

22 See Chapter 9 above.

23 Rudolf Dellsperger, Rudolf Freudenberger, and Wolfgang Weber, (eds.), *Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563) und die oberdeutsche Reformation* (Berlin: Akademischer Verlag, 1997), 281–98; Reinhard Bodenmann, *Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563). Destin d'un autodidacte lorrain au siècle des Réformes* (Geneva: Droz, 2000); see also Chapter 3 above.

24 For Sulzer, see Amy Nelson Burnett, "Bucers letzter Jünger. Simon Sulzer und Basels konfessionelle Einheit," *BZGA* 107 (2007), 137–72; Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, and Chapter 4 above; on "Lutheranizing Basel," see also the seminal work by Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century: Aspects of the City Republic before, during, and after the Reformation* (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982).

no surprise that Sulzer's Basel refused to join the Consensus Tigurinus and distanced itself from the Zwinglians, as it did from Calvin after he clashed with the Erasmian religious refugees in Basel, notably Sebastian Castellio and Celio Secondo Curione. Thanks to the university and the printing press, which remained among the most important in Europe until the 1580s, Basel was an intellectual center in its own right and was heavily influenced by the humanist tradition, which invited the study of secular and divine texts less for the sake of doctrinal truth than for moral learning and erudition. It was symptomatic that Basel kept its distance from Zurich and Bern when it joined the mercenary league, which eleven cantons and many of their allies renewed with France in June 1549, almost simultaneously to the *Consensus*.

In fact, this treaty with Henry II was an alternative strategy used as protection against the overwhelming influence of Charles V. Ever since his triumph over the Schmalkaldic League the emperor had threatened the equilibrium of Europe and particularly of Basel, which lay partly on the right side of the Rhine and had joined the Confederation only after the reforms of the imperial Diet of 1495, and was therefore still included in the imperial registry. The result was that Charles ordered Basel to implement the *Interim*. This threat passed when the Lutheran princes, together with Henry II, drove the emperor out of Germany in 1552. Basel remained in the "Lutheran" camp until 1585, when Sulzer died and the orthodox Calvinist Johann Jacob Grynaeus succeeded him as *Antistes*. Basel approached Zurich and Bern also because in 1585 Confederate arbitration forced the city to compensate the prince-bishop with a high sum for the rights he had ceded during the Reformation.

The theological closing of ranks between Zurich and Geneva and its repercussions for the Confederation prefigured the political and geographical structure of present-day Switzerland extending from and limited by the lakes of Constance and Geneva, and thus including a considerable francophone area. Catholic princes in Austria, Milan, Savoy, and France surrounded the country and became increasingly hostile to the Reformed, as did the Lutherans who now dominated the Protestant areas in Southern Germany. They felt reassured by the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which included the Lutherans but excluded the followers of Zwingli and Calvin in the Holy Roman Empire. The Swiss Reformed cantons became a refuge for their fellow believers, albeit often rather reluctantly. The case of Geneva had taught them that immigration could lead to the demise of the traditional elite. The expulsion of the Protestants of Locarno in 1555 had already posed serious problems for the Zurichers and Baslers, whose guilds were not disposed to share commercial activities with the arriving Muralto and Orelli families. Thus the Protestants were prone to observe the Peace of Kappel and the *cuius regio* rather than to provoke conflicts

that could harm their immediate interests. Instead of welcoming immigrants, they preferred to support financially the established Reformed parishes in the German-speaking mandated territories as well as their brethren in faith when they were persecuted abroad in Italy, France, England, Hungary, and Poland. Although Calvin and Bullinger may have felt equally sympathetic toward the persecuted, Geneva was far more hospitable to newcomers than Zurich. This was partly due to the fact that the guilds were rather weak in Geneva. Unlike the German urban reformation movement, the Genevan church was relatively free from state control, and it had a universal rather than parochial vision of its mission. Still, there were other routes that brought foreigners to Switzerland: the University of Basel attracted scholars from all over Europe, and the Valtellina and the Italian speaking valleys in the Grisons were the first destination for many Protestants fleeing from Italy.²⁵

To cope with their manifest isolation after 1555, the Reformed reached out for religious allies all over Europe.²⁶ Bullinger left behind 12,000 letters that present him as the center of a vast transnational web made up of about a thousand correspondents. He kept up-to-date contacts with Philipp of Hesse, the champion of Protestant unionism, and sent him both the *Consensus Tigurinus* and the Second Helvetic Confession (*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*).²⁷ The Second Helvetic Confession was a result of close ties with the Palatine elector Frederick III who started to draw the Palatinate into the Reformed camp in the early 1560s. For the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 the elector relied on experts with Melancthonian, Calvinist, and Zwinglian backgrounds. After imposing the Heidelberg Catechism on his own subjects, Frederick III had Bullinger's Latin manuscript translated into German and printed in 1566. Thomas Erastus from Baden belonged to the Zwinglians at the Palatine court. As a champion of the state church, he eventually had to surrender to the Calvinists in the matter of church discipline. Similarly, the Dutch eventually preferred the Genevan model of ecclesiastic autonomy to Zurich's state church. Nevertheless, Bullinger remained in close contact with politicians and scholars of the Palatinate and the Netherlands.²⁸ And Johann Jacob Grynaeus, who became the orthodox Antistes of Basel in 1585, was not the only conspicuous Reformed to study or teach at Heidelberg University before continuing his career in Switzerland.

25 Bundi, *Flüchtlingsschicksale*; see Chapters 7 and 8 above.

26 See also Locher, *Zwinglische Reformation*.

27 Text in RBS 2/2, 243–345. Andreas Mühling, *Heinrich Bullingers europäische Kirchenpolitik* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 74–96.

28 Mühling, *Kirchenpolitik*, 104–31.

Besides the Reformed territories in the Holy Roman Empire, the Zwinglians retained close ties with sympathizers in France and, more notably, in Scotland and England where Simon Grynaeus from Basel had already formed a friendship with Thomas Cranmer. Marian exiles, notably Peter Martyr Vermigli, fled from the island to Switzerland in the 1550s. In addition, several influential works, especially by Bullinger, were translated into English.²⁹ The Reformed in Hungary initially took their inspiration less from Calvin than from Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession, which they adopted at the Synod of Debrecen in 1567, as did the Reformed in Poland after reformulating it and calling it the *Confessio Sendomiriensis*.³⁰ Except for Lutheranizing Basel, which adopted the Second Helvetic Confession only in 1644, the Swiss Reformed all joined, including Mulhouse and Geneva; abroad, besides the Hungarians and the Poles, the Scottish Kirk and the French Huguenots also adopted it.

16.8 The Catholic Reaction

Whereas the "Reformed International," in spite of lasting doctrinal differences between Zwinglians and Calvinists especially concerning double predestination, developed a common dogmatic basis and thus closed its ranks, the Swiss Reformed did not establish military alliances with their fellow Protestants. In addition to geographical distance, this was also due to the Zwinglian rejection of foreign mercenary service and to the relatively unthreatened position of the large Reformed cities within the Confederation. This began to change when the Catholic cantons engaged with the Counter-Reformation after the end of the Council of Trent in 1563, which had already provided a theological and intellectual catalyst for the Second Helvetic Confession. Although they hesitated for a long time, the Catholic cantons sent not only a theological representative, Joachim Eichhorn, the Abbot of Einsiedeln, to the last period but also a leading politician, Melchior Lussi of Nidwalden. Lussi was also a friend of Carlo Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan, and invited him to impose Tridentine reforms in the Catholic cantons. These cantons had at first been reluctant to adopt such reforms for fear of alienating their French patron, since the Gallican conciliarists opposed papalism and the publication of the decrees of Trent.³¹ In 1586,

29 Mühling, *Kirchenpolitik*, 149–85; Gordon, *Swiss Reformation*, 299–304; see also Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

30 See Tamás Juhász, "Mirabilis est cursus verbi Dei!" Die Entwicklung des Helvetischen Bekenntnisses in Ungarn und Siebenbürgen," in Fata and Schindling, *Calvin und Reformiertentum*, 63–78.

31 See Delgado and Ries, *Karl Borromäus*.

Pope Sixtus v established a permanent nunciature in Lucerne, which subsequently became the institutional center of the Catholic reform in Switzerland. The Jesuits established a college there in 1578, and several cantons invited mostly foreign—that is, Italian—Capuchins to assume charge of pastoral care and reform the clergy; due to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, this situation often created problems. The *Collegium Helveticum* was set up in Milan, offering university places for future Swiss priests who gradually caught up with the scholarly advantage achieved by the Protestants. In the same year, 1586, the Catholic cantons formed the “Golden League,” also called the “Borromean League” after its spiritual father. A year later, they (without Solothurn) entered into an alliance with Philip II of Spain, the leading power of the Counter-Reformation. An ordinary ambassador represented him in Lucerne.

This close cooperation was not as obvious as it may seem at first glance. In 1559/60 the aforementioned Catholic politician and renowned historian Aegidius Tschudi almost provoked a war in his home canton of Glarus. The Catholic cantons, always afraid of being surrounded and destroyed by their Protestant neighbors, were ready to intervene in order to repress the Protestant majority in Glarus and to establish Catholic rule in the confessionally divided canton where—similar to the Three Leagues—the communities were almost autonomous in choosing their religion. The Catholics expected support from the pope and from Spain, which had just secured its predominance in Europe through the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis with France. However, Spain had gone bankrupt in 1557 and was not willing to risk another costly war that would put the exposed Spanish territory of the Franche-Comté in jeopardy. The Swiss, both Catholics and Protestants, officially vouched for the neutrality of the province, and in the case of a conflict between the two religious parties, there was the risk that Bern could invade the Franche-Comté.³²

In the second half of the 16th century the general situation changed. Spanish foreign policy became increasingly ideological in a salvific war against the heretics in England and the defecting Netherlands. France was no longer a rival, as it was being torn apart by religious wars that endangered the existence of the Huguenot co-religionists of the Swiss Calvinists. This was made especially clear in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572 that shocked

32 Rudolf Bolzern, “Der ‘Tschudikrieg’ im Spannungsfeld der ausländischen Mächte, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Spaniens,” in *Aegidius Tschudi und seine Zeit*, (eds.) Katharina Koller-Weiss and Christian Sieber (Basel: Krebs, 2002), 315–35; Markus René Wick, “Der ‘Glernerhandel.’ Strukturgeschichtliche und konfliktsoziologische Hypothesen zum Glarner Konfessionsgegensatz,” in *Jahrbuch des Historischen Vereins des Kantons Glarus* 69 (Glarus: 1982), 47–240.

Protestant Europe. The Reformed Confederates despaired of their former trust in the Valois dynasty, which sometimes used its Swiss mercenaries to eradicate Calvinist heresy. In the Catholic cantons, former Swiss exponents of the French alliance, such as Ludwig Pfyffer von Altishoffen from Lucerne, nicknamed "king of the Swiss," abandoned the maneuvering French king for the opposing Catholic League and its supporter Philipp II, who seemed to be the only reliable defender of the faith. What interested Spain most in this situation, besides the protection of its possessions in the Franche-Comté and Milan, was the *camino de suizos*, the transit routes that enabled Spanish troops to pass from Milan over the Gotthard Pass to the Rhine and onwards to Flanders to fight the Dutch. This was the alternative route to the *camino español*, which passed further west through the Duchy of Savoy, a long-time Spanish ally, and continued through the Franche-Comté.

This connection involved Switzerland in international affairs for different reasons: Swiss Catholics sympathized with Spain, and Protestant cantons favored the Dutch, the majority of whom were Reformed. Together Bern, Fribourg, and France had occupied most of the Duchy of Savoy in 1536, but in 1559, at the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, Henry II was forced to return his spoils. Under increasing pressure, Bern and its allies restituted conquests south of Lake Geneva and around Calvin's city in the 1560s, thus reestablishing the passage along the *camino español*. Geneva itself remained a thorn in the side of the duke of Savoy, both for political and religious reasons. This was well known to Bern, which had signed an *alliance perpétuelle* with Geneva in 1558 whereby both cities pledged to protect each other. By reentering the French alliance in 1564, Bern was following the same rationale of securing its flank against Savoy, which had built a league with the Catholic cantons (without Fribourg) in 1560 and renewed it in 1577 and 1581. Around the same time, 1579/80, the Catholic cantons also formed a close alliance with another long-term partner, the prince-bishop of Basel.

Unlike Constance, however, with its similar strategic and religious importance, Geneva was not conquered by a regional dynastic power. In 1579, Bern brought France and Catholic Solothurn together in an alliance to protect Geneva from Savoy. In 1584, Zurich also engaged in a formal *combourgeoisie* with Geneva, and in 1588 it signed, again with Bern, a defensive alliance for Strasbourg. In 1589/90, Bern and Geneva fought a war in Upper Savoy against Duke Charles Emmanuel I. Hence the importance of the opposing alliance that the Catholic cantons (without the Francophile Solothurn) formed with Spain in 1587: mighty Bern was now surrounded by potential enemies who had pledged to help each other in case one of them was attacked. Furthermore, they granted each other the right of transit and economic privileges. On the other side, already under Henry III, France started to turn away from its Counter-Reformation policy.

After Henry III was assassinated in 1589, the Huguenot king Henry IV opposed the Spanish party in France more than ever, ended the civil war in the realm, and, after his conversion to Catholicism, continued to support Protestants abroad. Unlike Spain, France was willing and able to pay the pensions it had promised, thus winning back many allies, even among the Catholic Swiss. Henry IV also won the war against the duke of Savoy who, after the failed “escalade” of 1602, had to accept Geneva’s independence in the treaty of Saint-Julien in 1603.³³

16.9 National Identity in a Time of Crisis

The struggle for Geneva formed the background for an ongoing Swiss propaganda battle in the 1570s and 80s, which was waged through pamphlets, theatre plays, and etchings like those by Christoph Murer from Zurich who engraved mythical scenes of Wilhelm Tell and Nicholas of Flüe (1417–1487). These historical references were symptomatic of a central and highly controversial question: Which party represented the real tradition of Switzerland and what did it consist of exactly? Nicholas of Flüe was a crucial figure in that regard: the



FIGURE 16.2 *Portion of an illustrated broadsheet by Christoph Murer showing Wilhelm Tell shooting the apple from his son’s head, 1580*
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZZB

33 See Chapter 9 above.

Protestants saw him as a peacemaker who warned of discord and foreign—Spanish and Jesuit—interference in Swiss affairs; the Catholics laid claim to the pious pre-reformation hermit who would be beatified in 1649 (veneration in his place of origin, Sachseln) and in 1671 (veneration in all of Switzerland); canonization followed in 1947.³⁴

This clash over ancestors was a decisive turn away from the first generation of the Reformation, especially Vadian in St. Gallen and Bullinger, Johannes Stumpf, and Josias Simler in Zurich, who had closely cooperated with the prominent Catholic Aegidius Tschudi in historiographical projects that emphasized common ground and origins beyond confessional strife. The historical commonalities went back, allegedly, to Helvetian ancestors. The ethnic continuity was localized in the qualities of an alpine nation—an “*Alpenvolk*.” Stumpf’s *Description of the Deeds Worthy of Chronicling of the Common Praiseworthy Confederation of Cities, Lands and Peoples*,³⁵ an impressive folio printed in 1548 containing high quality maps, was the most conspicuous result of this collaboration, although Tschudi’s research and theses about the foundation of the Confederation would eventually have an even larger impact in the 18th century, when the first printed edition of his *Chronicon Helveticum* became the source for Friedrich Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*. This interdenominational cooperation ended as soon as the aforementioned historians died in the 1570s.³⁶ The little that remained of Swiss historiography unambiguously sided with one religious party, like the works of Frank Guillimann from Fribourg, a follower of Spain who emigrated to become a university professor in the Habsburg city of Freiburg im Breisgau.

The lasting tension and the conflicting orientation in foreign policy ended by establishing clear religious frontiers in Switzerland, including the *Zugewandte*, and connected the parties to the international networks that had emerged before the Thirty Years’ War. France remained the only broker with access to both sides. The convert Henry IV had remained a reliable partner of the Protestant cantons who contributed many mercenaries to his armies, even from Zurich—albeit unofficially. In 1602 all cantons entered the renewed French alliance except for Zurich; this was a last obeisance to the city’s ministers who defended the Zwinglian doctrine on mercenary service. However, Zurich sympathized with the French alliance and allowed volunteers from its territory to join Henry’s IV troops. In 1614, Zurich finally also entered into this fundamental treaty and broke with an almost centenarian tradition—without

34 See Chapter 1 above.

35 *Gemeiner loblicher Eydgnoschaft Stetten, Landen und Völckeren chronickwirdiger thaaten beschreybung* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1548).

36 Moser, *Dignität*, 1: 308–11.



FIGURE 16.3 "The old and new prophet of Switzerland," an illustrated political poem ca. 1607 showing the Confederate cantons, their allies, and foreign powers, Drawing on parchment paper

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZZB, GRAPHISCHE SAMMLUNG

consulting the ministers or subjects, as had been done in preceding cases. This conversion was the result of an international situation wherein the Habsburg states, which encircled the Confederation almost completely, seemed to increasingly take the lead in an international Counter-Reformation offensive that only France could inhibit by military means. It also seemed appropriate to manifest a common foreign policy for the Confederation during dangerous times, at least through the French alliance that was also welcome because it promised guerdon and pensions.³⁷

37 Christian Moser and Hans Rudolf Fuhrer, *Der lange Schatten Zwinglis. Zürich, das französische Soldbündnis und eidgenössische Bündnispolitik, 1500–1650* (Zürich: NZZ Verlag, 2009), 72–7.

16.10 International Networks before the Thirty Years' War

In 1612 and 1615, Zurich and Bern entered into further military alliances, first with the neighboring Margraviate of Baden-Durlach and then with Venice. While the former was a Lutheran territory and member of the Protestant Union that since 1609 had opposed the Catholic League, Venice was Catholic. Still, it was the fiercest opponent of Spanish domination in Italy and an important member in the chain of Habsburg enemies that stretched from England and the Netherlands over the Palatinate and Reformed territories in the Holy Roman Empire and Switzerland down to the Adriatic Sea. It remained so even after the assassination of Henry IV, who had been the mastermind of this informal alliance. Zurich and Bern's treaty with Venice granted mutual aid in times of crisis and reciprocal commercial privileges.

Using the same rationale, Venice had already formed an alliance with the Three Leagues in 1603 that was intended not only to profit their merchants and soldiers but also to block the passes linking the Habsburg territories of Milan and Tyrol. However, in 1613 a majority of the communes rejected a renewal of the alliance, not least due to political pressure from Spain on the Catholic Graubündners. A similar process split Appenzell in 1597. A year earlier, the Catholic communes of what would become Appenzell Innerrhoden adhered to the Spanish alliance of 1587 without considering the opposition of the Protestant communes who then formed a half-canton of their own, Appenzell Außerrhoden.³⁸ Arbiters from six cantons, half Protestant, half Catholic, moderated a surprisingly peaceful separation. These overpopulated alpine areas depended heavily on mercenary service and pensions, which also explains the "communalization" of foreign policy and the corresponding intensification of confessional identities.

Glarus later chose a similar path to Appenzell, after the Reformed majority imposed an alliance with Zurich and the predominantly Protestant League of the Ten Jurisdictions, one of Graubünden's Three Leagues. In 1623 the communes had the power to decide individually which camp they wanted to choose in mercenary business. This was part of an arrangement that clearly defined which offices were at the disposal of the Protestants and which ones were at the disposal of the Catholics. Thus Glarus, without openly splitting like Appenzell, became *de facto* a canton with two largely independent political entities.

38 Peter Blickle, "Verfassung und Religion. Voraussetzungen und Folgen der Landesteilung des Appenzell 1597," *Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung* 115 (1998), 339–60.

The strong position of the communes in these alpine areas led to a religious plurality that depended on communal choice, but it also allowed these valleys to cohabitate without civil wars. The only exception to this was the Three Leagues, which became heavily involved in the Thirty Years' War after the revolt in the Catholic Valtellina in 1620, itself a reaction to Protestant repression culminating in the torture and murder of arch-priest Nicolò Rusca from Sondrio in 1618.³⁹ But the subsequent series of conflicts can more easily be explained by the strategic value that Graubünden's valleys and passes had for the Habsburgs, who sent their troops from Milan to Austria and Bohemia. France wanted to interrupt this supply, and thus the main antagonists of the spreading European war fought their battles in Graubünden with the help of many local politicians and military entrepreneurs.⁴⁰

The other alpine confederation, the Valais, regained confessional—that is, Catholic—uniformity in the early 17th century. In 1600 the *Zenden* formed an alliance with the overwhelmingly Reformed Graubünden, despite opposition from both the bishop of Sion and the allied Catholic cantons. The pact was manifestly directed against Spain. Many influential Catholics in the Valais tolerated and even backed the Protestants, who were particularly strong among the patricians in Sion and Leuk and had the support of neighboring Bern. They were united in their opposition to the bishop's secular lordship, since religious liberty was considered a part of communal autonomy and sovereignty. But when the bishop lost his secular power and the Valais became a republic of its own in 1628, the Protestants had to convert or emigrate because the majoritarian Catholics controlled the prevailing *Zenden* of the Upper Valais and relied not only on help from the Catholic cantons but also from Spain and Savoy.⁴¹ As in the rest of Switzerland, foreign policy and mercenary alliances triggered the clear bipolar boundaries and inimical identities of the two religious camps. Still, the traditional and well-established ties, the imperatives of everyday contacts, and the mediation of foreigners, especially France, prevented military clashes between the parties unless the powers themselves were directly involved, as they were in the Grisons.

39 *Bündner Geschichte*, 2: 113–202; for conflict and cohabitation among the communes in the Grisons, see Pfister, *Konfessionskirchen*, esp. 365–437.

40 Andreas Wendland, *Der Nutzen der Pässe und die Gefährdung der Seelen. Spanien, Mailand und der Kampf ums Veltlin (1620–1641)* (Zurich: Chronos, 1995).

41 Schnyder, *Reformation*; see Chapter 7 above.

16.11 Conclusion

The 16th century was not an easy time for city republics. Of the Italian communes, only the merchant republics—Venice, Genoa, and Lucca—survived on a peninsula dominated by the Spanish monarchy. The same Habsburg dynasty subordinated both the Spanish *comuneros* and the imperial cities of the Schmalkaldic League and later fought fiercely against the cities that defended religious and fiscal privileges in the Netherlands. The demise of the Hanseatic League proved that in order to remain independent notwithstanding superior princely powers, cities needed either a considerable territory of their own or adjacent territories in a league. This was the case for the Swiss Confederation, which as a defensive league was able to stand confessional schism. In the eyes of most of its contemporaries, diversity in confession was unsupportable from a religious perspective and harmful and paralyzing from a political perspective. How could a society achieve justice and concord if it disagreed on the essential matters of truth and salvation? How could a state find political solutions or wage war if neither a prince nor shared religious convictions imposed unity? If one party sided with Counter-Reformation Spain and depended on guerdon and pensions while the other oscillated between a Zwinglian refusal of any alliance and loyalty to the Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire and France, could there be any lasting political stability or even continuity?

Indeed, the Confederation did experience religious civil wars in both 1531 and 1656, but this was nothing compared with the French Wars of Religion or the Schmalkaldic War, let alone the Thirty Years' War. Rather surprisingly, the cantons managed to remain outside of these conflicts in their immediate neighborhood, despite the fact that many Swiss mercenaries served in the opposing camps. With the telling exception of Graubünden's passes, Switzerland was in the lee of the European monarchs' strategic interests. Its main contribution to the international power struggle was its mercenaries, both Catholic and Protestant, who fought for any state that paid them. France, which needed soldiers most, protected the Swiss equilibrium and mitigated the parties' differences during conflicts that could compromise its military reservoir.

Both in France and in the Empire, the religious wars were also about the political structure in which the estates and the high nobility on one side and the emperor and king on the other fought over an absolutist or a corporative constitution and the respective powers of disposal. The Swiss elites, on the other side, were saturated with their rights, their possessions and their archaic constitution. What diplomats started to label *corpus helveticum* essentially took Switzerland's present-day territorial shape in the 16th century in both its external borders with neighbors and its internal borders between cantons. Distant



FIGURE 16.4 *Nicholas of Flüe counseling the 13 Confederates while they take their oath at Stans. Painting by Humbert Mareschet (1586), based on a sketch by Christoph Murer*

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commitments, such as Rottweil, were abandoned, while Vaud, Neuchâtel, and Geneva became part of the political and religious Swiss networks. Zwingli's expansionist agenda might have eventually toppled the league of coequal cantons, but after Kappel no military defeat implicated the loss of cantonal territories or a centralizing change of the Confederation's loose constitution, which essentially allowed the cantons to remain sovereign.

While there were many differences between the cantons, not only in religion but also in language, economic activities, and governmental structure, the respective rupture lines were incongruent. The cantonal elites did not differ significantly from each other socially, but they differed when compared with foreign princes and noblemen. They all feared interventions from abroad and increasingly barred access to citizenship and offices in order to exclude the

middling ranks from political participation and foreign immigrants from economic privileges.

What at first glance seemed deficient was, in fact, a rather flexible political framework. Most cantons were religiously homogeneous, hence stable. In religiously mixed areas, especially in the mandated territories, everyday pragmatism and arbitration prevailed over open conflict, even though familiarity with the neighbors of different faith decreased. This was also evident at the Diet where confessional plurality made a common foreign policy impossible. However, this plurality ultimately benefitted the Swiss because, uncertain as they were among themselves about eternal, divine truth, it allowed them to abstain from the destructive wars that were being waged over these issues in the rest of Europe.