Catholic Missionaries in a Territory of Reunion

The French Crown and the Congregation of the Mission in Sedan, 1642–57

The frontier regions of seventeenth-century France have captured considerable scholarly attention, generally in terms of military occupation and French foreign policy under the belligerent Louis XIV. Although subjected to less scrutiny, analysis of frontier areas during his father’s reign has benefited from the important studies of provincial regions undertaken by scholars such as William Beik and James Collins, whose examinations of Languedoc and Brittany respectively have improved our understanding of civic and political relations between centre and periphery in this period. However, both of these regions were pays d’états traditionally under French monarchical rule, rather than pays conquis as in Lorraine and Savoy, duchies occupied by Louis XIV in 1670 and 1690 respectively. They were also distinguished from the territory of Sedan on the north-eastern border of France, which was acquired by the French crown only in 1642, and whose political status remained contested until 1657. As a frontier region, Sedan was of paramount strategic importance to the French crown, because it formed a line of defence against Habsburg aggression in the Thirty Years War and subsequently in the war that continued between France and Spain until 1659. The ambiguity surrounding the nature and terms of its occupation ensured, however, that the Bourbon takeover of the territory needed to be handled with particular sensitivity to local circumstances and loyalties, not least those of religion, for the majority of the inhabitants were Protestants, just as their traditional rulers, the La Tour dynasty, had been. Simultaneously, because the French crown’s principal objective was the perpetuation of its influence in the area, the issues of religious affiliation and identity afforded it


2. The French occupied Lorraine from 1670 to 1677, and again partially from 1702 to 1714. They occupied Savoy for six successive years in the 1690s, before returning to occupy between 1703 and 1711: Phil McCluskey, French military occupations of Lorraine and Savoie, 1670–1714, PhD dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2009.
opportunities to promote its authority in alliance with the gallican branch of the Catholic Church, then well on the path to recovery after the debilitating impact of the religious wars of the late sixteenth century. For those Catholic clerics with whom it chose to collaborate in reintegrating this confessionally divided area, principally the members of the Congregation of the Mission led by Vincent de Paul, Sedan offered new evangelical terrain, in which the ambitions of reformers in the French church might meet success in Protestant conversions and renewed Catholic fidelities under the patronage of the French crown.

Ruled by the hereditary dynasty of La Tour since the middle ages, the occasion for the French takeover of Sedan was the involvement of its then ruler, Frédéric-Maurice de La Tour d'Auvergne, duc de Bouillon, in the Cinq-Mars conspiracy of 1642. Fearing that the chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, intended to assert French sovereignty over the strategically situated Sedan, Bouillon gambled on a military alliance with Richelieu's court opponents to safeguard his territory, hoping that the removal of the chief minister from power would spell an end to the threat to his lands. The resulting conspiracy of Cinq-Mars, so-called because of the involvement of the king's favourite, the marquis de Cinq-Mars, was a faction of united interests, most seeking to secure their positions in the event of the ailing king's death, and including Louis's brother, Gaston d'Orléans, and his wife, Anne of Austria. Sedan was to serve as a launching pad for armed revolt, or a refuge in the event of discovery. Unfortunately for the conspirators details of their scheme leaked out, so that the cardinal was able to communicate news of it to the king, who ordered the arrest of Cinq-Mars and Bouillon. Meanwhile, Gaston decided to save his skin by confessing to his involvement, with the result that Cinq-Mars was executed in September 1642, and Sedan was swiftly placed under the control of the French crown. It was an annexation long desired by Richelieu, for Sedan formed a weak point in the north-eastern frontier of France, and it contained a fortress which could, he assumed, serve as a major citadel for the patrolling of the entire length of the border.3

3 Along with Raucourt and Saint-Menges, two small adjoining territories held by Frédéric-Maurice and also occupied by the French crown in 1642: Simon Hodson, Sovereigns and subjects: the princes of Sedan and dukes of Bouillon in early modern France, c.1450–1692, D.Phil., Oxford University, 1999, 339, 350–54. I am grateful to Dr Hodson for supplying me with a copy of his thesis.
In the process of assimilation that followed, the monarchy claimed that the territory was not a pays conquis, but rather an area of the royal domain which had been temporarily set apart from the rest of its components, and was now rightfully restored to the crown. Reflecting this stance, in February 1644, the royal edict of reunion formally reincorporated Sedan into the royal domain. In reality, however, its status was more ambiguous and distinctive. Historically, La Tour princes had not regarded themselves as subjects of the French king. Rather, they had insisted that they exercised sovereign authority over an independent territory and were therefore entitled to be treated as sovereign princes in French service, who had freely placed their principality under French protection. As a prince étranger, Frédéric-Maurice governed a dynastic territory possessing its own systematic body of law and felt quite entitled to remove Sedan from French protection should it serve his interests. However, his assumptions were diametrically opposed to the official position assumed by the French crown in the 1640s, which ignored the privileged relationship that this frontier region claimed to have, and used its taking of Sedan in 1642 and the edict of reunion in 1644 to label Frédéric-Maurice as a rebellious and disloyal subject who was guilty of lèse-majesty.
Sedan was further distinguished by the religious diversity of its population, the majority of which were Protestant and the remainder Catholic (totalling approximately 2,500 and 1,500 respectively). Unlike the occupations of Lorraine or Savoie later in the century, which were both almost exclusively Catholic, the crown's takeover of Sedan was complicated by the fact that the religious loyalties of the population were mixed. This duality of affiliation made religious difference a key concern for the French Catholic crown in the establishment of its rule in the region, because the strategy that it pursued to this end needed to take account of local religious identities. For Protestants in the region, their political loyalty to the La Tour princes had rested partially on a shared religious heritage, since the La Tour rulers had until 1636 shared their creed and had acted as the protectors of the faith in their territory. In effect, they had been the arbiters of formal expressions of identity through their establishment of independent ecclesiastical systems for both denominations. From the 1560s, these were administered by a Board of Ecclesiastical Finance, which oversaw the management of all church property, payment of tithes, clerical salaries, religious worship, education and so on. While the practice of the Catholic religion was not outlawed in Sedan, the prince heavily favoured the Protestant church, which gained the lion's share of funding that ensured that Sedan developed a reputation as a protestant stronghold. Shrunk in clerical numbers, funding and infrastructure, the Catholic church's position improved slightly in 1636 when the young Frédéric-Maurice, under the influence of his new wife, Eleonore de Bergh, converted to Catholicism. But, in an attempt to allay the fears of the Protestant majority, he did not alter in any way the primacy of the Protestant church, though he did permit a small number of Capuchins to minister in the area in 1639.

All of this was rendered obsolete by the removal of Frédéric-Maurice from power, however, for the status of both denominations had been entirely dependent on his will and authority. Indeed, the Catholic religion within this border region had been completely outside the framework of normal ecclesiastical hierarchies of jurisdiction in the church; unlike areas of Huguenot settlement elsewhere, it was not incorporated into a diocese and subject to the rule of a bishop, but depended on secular dynastic support that was so

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4 Archives Nationales de France (AN), K117 (February 1644).
5 Pierre Congar, Le Calvinisme à Sedan, Méthod, Avril–Juin, 1963, 9–12; Abbé Pregnon, Histoire du pays et de la ville de Sedan depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours, 3 vols, Charleville, 1856, i, 305.
minimal that the church rarely existed institutionally. On Frédéric-Maurice’s departure, even this disappeared. Yet the reality of religious division and the existence of a faith that differed from that of the French monarch remained. Since 1598, the crown had dealt with this type of confessional bifurcation by implementing the terms of the Edict of Nantes, which had marked the conclusion of the religious wars with formal rights of worship to members of the reformed faith. It had continued this policy even after the successful siege of La Rochelle and the subsequent Peace of Alais had confirmed the destruction of Huguenot strongholds in the south and west of France in 1629. However, it had proceeded aggressively in its drive to reinforce crown and Catholic hegemony in the centre-ouest, in a bid to ensure that the area, hitherto dominated by Huguenot nobles, remained quiescent and obedient. It opened it to widespread and aggressively pursued Catholic missions, notably those undertaken by the Capuchins under Richelieu’s confidant, Père Joseph, and reconfigured the boundaries of Catholic dioceses to form the large new diocese of La Rochelle. The explicit aim of the missions was conversion of Huguenots, who were subjected to severe pressure to abandon their faith in order to eradicate the duality of religious identity in the region.

The crown’s insistence that Sedan was a reunited territory of the realm suggested that it could be treated in precisely the same manner as La Rochelle and other Huguenot territories in France. In Sedan, however, the crown had to tread carefully, for the practice of Protestantism was associated closely with loyalty to the departed La Tour dynasty and could quickly be turned into a form of religious dissidence against the government of the French king. This was particularly likely should the crown’s policy towards the Catholic minority infringe on traditional Protestant privileges bestowed by the La Tour rulers, and

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meant that the treatment of Sedan as a possession rightfully reunited with the
crown domain needed in fact to take account of the sovereign prerogatives long
claimed by the region’s rulers. As a result, while crown policy was built on the
assumption that Sedan was not a formerly sovereign territory, in practice, in
enacting a religious policy it had to treat it as though it had been.

A further reason that encouraged the crown to step cautiously in taking over
Sedan was the awkward fact that neither the principles nor the process of its occu-
pation were universally agreed. Through the 1640s and 1650s, Frédéric-Maurice
and his wife continued to assert their opposition to the French crown’s ‘domina-
tion’ of Sedan through ‘deprivation’ of its rightful sovereigns, in the hope either
of regaining their territory or receiving adequate compensation for its unlawful
seizure. In their battle with the Bourbon government, it was conceivable that
the publicity of their cause would preserve and indeed strengthen local loyalty to
their rule, thus undermining the French monarchy’s claim that it had legitimately
reintegrated Sedan to its domain and weakening its ability to assert its rule there.
Finally, dissatisfied with the progress of his cause, Bouillon joined other nobles
in the Fronde in 1649, further threatening the solidity of the crown’s position on
the frontier. In desperation, Mazarin first toyed briefly with returning Sedan to
his rule in exchange for his loyalty, before finally over-turning a decade of French
policy by agreeing to a treaty of exchange which recognised the formerly sovereig
status of Sedan in 1651. After the Paris parlement paralysed the enactment of the
treaty terms because it objected to this change, the crown issued lettres de jussion
in 1657 which expressly confirmed that Sedan was a formerly independent sov-
ereignty and granted restitution to its erstwhile ruling family in the form of the
duchies of Albrer and Château-Thierry.

Sanctioning the status of Sedan as a territory of reunion, Louis XIII appoint-
ed the marquis of Fabert as governor of the region on 29 September 1642, with
responsibility to oversee the reabsorption of Sedan into France, and to re-es-
ablish it as a frontier of the French realm. Fabert travelled to Sedan to oversee the
crown’s political and military interests shortly afterwards, remaining there until
his death in 1662. Very quickly, it became obvious that the crown intended that
its objectives in religion should contribute to its meeting of its political ambitions.

9 Manifeste de Monseigneur le duc de Bouillon à la reynge régent, 1643, 10.
10 Hodson, Sovereigns and Subjects, 379–81.
11 Pregnon, Histoire, 1, 362–4. See also the standard biography of Fabert: Jules Bourelly,
Le Maréchal de Fabert (1599–1662): étude historique d’après ses lettres et des pièces inédites,
Paris, 1881.
In February 1643, Fabert risked alienating the Protestant majority when he re-established 'the entire liberty and exercise of the catholic religion'. But in an effort to discourage civil unrest and to provide a smooth transition from La Tour rule, he forbade debate of religious topics in public and threatened severe penalties on those who instigated confrontations between the two denominations, particularly during rituals that had historically here and in other areas been used to score sectarian points, such as 'the transport of the sacrament to the sick... processions, baptisms, [and] burials'. To appease Catholics, he forbade shops to open on feast days, effectively closing Sedan down to anything but religious devotions on these occasions of Catholic celebration, but also ridding it of another issue that was often a source of contention in areas shared by the two faiths.\textsuperscript{12}

These measures marked the beginning of the crown's attempt to assert its dominance by controlling religious affairs in the region and indicated that it wished to proceed by avoiding confrontation in order to achieve a smooth process of reintegration. Until his death in 1662, Fabert therefore continued to follow a strategy of conciliation and appeasement, based on the crown's recognition of existing religious divisions in the region. In June 1644, the Edict of Rueil affirmed that the Protestant inhabitants could retain their temple in Sedan and provided them with two additional temples in Francheval and Givonne so that they would no longer have to share them, turn upon turn, with Catholics. It also made provision for separate graveyards to be allotted to the community in the hope that this would reduce the potentiality for disputes over burial rites and space.\textsuperscript{13}

Essential to the process of providing for Catholicism in Sedan was the provision of sufficient clergy to minister to the faithful there. While the Protestant


\textsuperscript{13} ACMP, Fonds Contassot 'Sedan II'.
congregation was left to provide its own clergy, the crown incorporated the Catholics of the region into the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Reims, and therefore into the French church. Historically, Sedan actually lay in three dioceses, of which only one was French. Its wholesale incorporation into Reims was therefore a political statement in itself, for the placing of a region which had been excluded from episcopal governance for generations under French episcopal supervision provided an opportunity for the French crown to co-operate with the French church in establishing structures and practices that would distinguish a resurgent Catholic community.

In this region too, however, the choices that the crown made reflected its interest in avoiding confrontation and further destabilising this vulnerable area. With scarcely any Catholic clergy active in Sedan, it was imperative to ensure that an adequate pastoral ministry was provided by clergy dedicated to the promotion of Catholicism in the region. Yet rather than patronising the Capuchins who had a well-earned reputation as missionaries in contested localities, the crown decided to establish the Congregation of the Mission, a small society of secular priests under the leadership of Vincent de Paul since its foundation in 1625. One of a number of sacerdotal associations founded during the Catholic Reformation in France, its confères specialised in performing peripatetic missions for Catholics in rural areas of the realm. Sedan offered an unusual environment for this youthful congregation; its members were far less accustomed than either the Capuchins or the Jesuits to the work of religious controversy and conversion, and did not share the polemical skills these had honed in confronting Protestant ministers and doctrines in their preaching and public rituals of piety such as the eucharistic forty hours devotion. They were also far less numerous. Yet it is clear that those who originated their call to the region considered that they were particularly well fitted to the political and religious landscape there.

According to de Paul, Louis XIII recognised that the Congregation’s ethos and methods dovetailed neatly with the policy of conciliation that he wished to implement in Sedan. As de Paul reminded the superior of the new house, Guillaume Gallais, on his arrival in Sedan in early May 1643, ‘when the King

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14 The other dioceses were Trier and Liège: Jacques Rousseau, Les Sources de l’histoire de Sedan, Annales Sedanaises d’Histoire et d’Archéologie, 45, 1961, 3–8.
sent you to Sedan, it was on condition never to dispute against heretics, neither in the pulpit nor in private, knowing that this is of little use and very often one produces more noise than fruit'. The king made his request of de Paul on his deathbed in May, but the policy that inspired it was subsequently carried through by the regency government of Anne of Austria, whose strategy was one of moderation and appeasement, tempered with a firm show of authority. It was designed, as the queen mother emphasised to Fabert, to entice the Sedanese 'to love the domination of the king' and the Congregation was to act as a stabilizing force in this seduction. It was imperative, the chief minister Mazarin agreed, that the crown demonstrate through this approach that it had the best interests of the Sedanese at heart, that is, that its 'particular care of their interests' rested on a desire to 'protect them' in all encounters. While the king's paternal authority was absolute over this restored 'son', it would be expressed in as benign a manner as possible.

The terms agreed for the Congregation's presence in Sedan ensured that the confrères who worked there were representatives of both the church and the crown. The returns for their obedience were handsome. The basis of the deal was Louis XIII's bequeathal of 24,000 livres to the Congregation, which was to be used to establish a mission in Sedan 'to affirm the Catholics [and] to try to restore to the bosom of the Church the number of souls that heresy had turned away'. This was part of a much larger legacy, from which the remaining 40,000 livres was to be devoted to missionary work in other locations chosen by de Paul and the Jesuit royal confessor and French provincial, Jacques Dinet. A further contract on 14 June 1644 enabled Anne of Austria to improve the terms under which the Congregation would operate there: the entire sum of 64,000 was to be invested and the revenue placed at de Paul's disposal for use in Sedan.

16 Jacqueline Kilat et al. (eds.), Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Documents, Conferences, 14 vols, New York, 1978-present, ii, de Paul to Guillaume Gallais (superior in Sedan), c.1643.
17 Bibliothèque Arsenal, Paris, Ms 5416, fos 203v–1v, Anne of Austria to Abraham de Fabert, 24 July 1643: 'aymer la domination du Roy'.
18 Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris, Ms 2244, unpaginated, Jules Mazarin to Abram Fabert, 26 May 1644: 'un soin particulier de leurs intérêts et de les protéger'.
19 The money paid for the construction of thirteen houses at the das Saint-Laurent, just north of the Congregation's motherhouse in Paris (Saint-Lazare); these raised rent of 1700/ per year, to which de Paul added an additional 900/ to maintain the house in Sedan annually. The contracts stipulated that six priests and two brothers were to reside in the community, but its numbers fluctuated regularly. In total, forty priests and clerics as well as four brothers resided in Sedan between 1643 and 1660, but the house maintained the eight clerics that its contract stipulated for parochial duties and missions in only
Arrangements for the Congregation’s arrival in Sedan formed part of a larger process in which the archbishop of Reims formalised the presence of the Catholic Church, on the personal request of the queen mother. Etampes evidently gave great satisfaction in this task, for he was congratulated by Mazarin for his ‘capacity and zeal’ and for his ability to satisfy even the members of the reformed religion, while carrying out this sensitive but ‘so holy and so necessary work’. It included assigning the cure of Sedan to the Congregation, so that its members were parish priests in the area as well as missionaries to it, dual functions which granted them extensive control over pastoral practices. The archbishop also had to find 2500l in additional income for their new house, which he diverted from taxes (dimes), tithes and rentes levied in Sedan. These practical issues were settled in October 1644, shortly after Etampes had undertaken a visit to Sedan to examine his new territory. In the ceremonies that he carried out in August, he relied heavily on the newly established community of Congregation priests to assert the confident Catholic and Bourbon occupation of Sedan. These began with a triumphant fusion of French and Catholic loyalties in public rituals that honoured Louis XIII’s consecration of the realm to the Virgin Mary in 1638 and marked Sedan’s inclusion under her blessed patronage. The Congregation superior welcomed the archbishop to Sedan with a short harangue at the doors of Saint Laurent parish church, while all five Congregation priests took prominent positions amongst those who sang the te deum at the pontifical mass that the archbishop then celebrated in the church, and at which he distributed communion to 800 parishioners. In turn, to support their ministry in the parish, the archbishop approved the payment of 10,000l for essential renovations to the dilapidated church fabric, which bore the scars of years of neglect, and for the purchase of ecclesiastical ornaments.

seven years, and in only four years did the number of its residents exceed this minimal requirement. Priests spent an average of three years in Sedan, while brothers spent an average of ten years. Bibliotheque Nationale de France (BN), NAF, 22326, fo 56v; AN, S6597 (22 August 1643); Kilar et al. (eds.), Correspondence, vols. 13a, 337–8. For the episcopal decree confirming possession of the cure, see AN, S6710 (October 1643).

20 Bibliotheque Mazarine, MS 2214, unpagedinated, Jules Mazarin to Lénot de Etampes de Valençay, 10 September: ‘votre capacité et du zèle ... une œuvre si sainte et si nécessaire’.

21 BN, NAF 22326, fo 56v–7v.

22 BN, Champagne 36, 1210–23v; Guillaume Marlot, Histoire de la ville, cite et université de Reims, 4 vols, Reims, 1846, iv, 571–2.
Three months before, the same priests had also assumed a leading role in the ceremonies in which Sedanese residents took an oath of fidelity to their new ruler, at three locations marking the key bases of Catholic and royal power, the parish church, town hall and governor's château. Indeed, the Congregation residents were the first to take the vow on 28 April and set an example for the other clergy, parishioners and Protestants who gathered in the town by demonstrating their loyalty and service to church and crown. On the day of the ceremony, Fabert, accompanied by officers of his garrison, first processed to the parish church from his château, where he found the Reverend Fathers of the Mission ... all dressed in their surplices and stoles, also with the cross and alb. We read our commission in the presence of these and of a great number of people, who were assembled there ... each of them individually having their hand at their breast, made the vow of fidelity ... And from this Holy church after having heard the holy Mass which was celebrated by the said G. Gallais parish priest ... we [were] transported to the town hall.23 There, Fabert and his officers took the oath, followed by urban notables who included local Protestant ministers and faculty of the Protestant academy, and other inhabitants. This vow specifically obliged its takers to comport themselves as 'good and loyal subjects' of the French monarch, while forbidding them to communicate with anyone else (obviously Frédéric-Maurice or his heirs) who held pretensions to rule in Sedan.24

Promotion of loyalty to the new regime through public rituals was an integral element of the Congregation's responsibilities in Sedan, but its members were, of course, also designated as parish clergy and missionaries to regenerate the Catholic faith through the renewal of devotions. Service to the Catholic residents began immediately on arrival, with the missionaries simply adopting their usual practice of completing a mission as soon as they settled in the town, before settling into a routine of ministry in the parish and occasional missions in the surrounding area.25 Taking stock, Gallais reported to de Paul on the state

23 BN, NAF 9787, fo 125r–26r: 'en la grand eglise paroissiale de lad. Ville a l'entrée de la quelle nous aurions trouvé les Reverendes Peres de la mission ... tout revues de leurs surplis et des estoilles aussi la croix et aubevite, en presence des quelles et de grand nombre de people, qui estoit assemblé, chacun d'eux en particuliers ayant la main a la poitrine, fait le serment de fidelité ... Et de la S. eglise après avoir ouy la ste. Messe qui a esté celebre par led. G. Gallais curé ... Nous serions acheminez, en l'hôtel delad. Ville'.

24 On 1 May, residents of hamlets outside the town took the vow: BN, NAF 9787, fo 132v–2r.

25 The priests established a confraternity of charity for the sick poor, normally a characteristic feature of the Congregation's missions, but here adapted to parochial ministry. The
of Catholic piety, stating that 'we have to work with them as we would with completely new people'. His explanation for why this was so drew a distinction between the strategies that different missionary groups customarily employed in their pastoral care. Gallais opined that far too much time had been spent on polemical preaching in the immediate past, and although he did not expressly point an accusing finger at the Capuchins, he may well have had them in mind. According to him, the people were quite ignorant as a result: 'several admitted openly that they had not believed it necessary to confess all their sins. The same abuses were being committed with regard to Holy Communion, etc'. Thus, his priests had received a favourable response when they began to instruct the people in the fundamentals of devotion, for 'they would listen with pleasure to what was said to them and put it into practice faithfully'.

A leading Protestant who witnessed the missionaries' tactics was nonplussed by them, for they did not follow the conventions of controversial discourse to which he was more accustomed in France. The famed pastor, preacher and controversialist Charles Drelincourt was a native of Sedan and a graduate of its academy. Although based in Charenton, he was a regular visitor to the area and maintained contact with kin and friends there. He was consequently well placed to comment on the new missionaries. In his 1648 *Dialogues familiers sur les principales objections des Missionnaires de ce temps*, he took them to task, sarcastically calling them tiresome 'flies, who always return although one hunts them and never cease to bother you'. They returned again and again, he claimed, to points that had already been refuted by generations of protestant theologians, singing 'the same song' and flying 'the same circle'. But they shied clear of direct altercation and preferred simply to teach key doctrines repetitively to their audiences in catechetical sessions and to concentrate on other points and practices that he considered inconsequential for spiritual health. For Drelincourt, their

confraternity was established soon after the first missionaries arrived, and became the recipient of testamentary bequests from pious parishioners; for instance in 1647, the widower Gilles Vassone bequeathed 300 livres to the confraternity. Later wills indicate that this confraternity continued to operate through the century: AD Ardennes, G246 and M1 634.

26 Kilari et al. (eds.), *Correspondance*, Vol. 2, 441, Guillaume Gallais de de Paul, 1643. This suggests that there may have been some local rivalry between the Congregation and the Capuchins, as occurred in other territities where differences in regard to pastoral approaches and access to resources ensured competition between secular and regular clergy or between different religious orders. For an introduction to this topic, see my *Fathers, Bishops, Kings: ViIlons of Episcopacy in Seventeenth-Century France*, chs 3-4.
avoidance of the customary format for disputations between the denominations offered proof that their claims were not founded on scripture but was a strategy that they had devised to deflect attention from this fundamental weakness of their faith.  

Despite Drelincourt's distaste for the Congregation's approach, this was why the crown had chosen it for Sedan; and it was standard practice for its missionaries wherever they went. It also marked them out as representatives of a distinctive strand of missionary action in the Catholic Reformation, even though this is usually overshadowed by the Baroque Jesuit style in scholarship. De Paul did not allow his men to challenge Protestants directly anywhere, and indeed initially he appeared to assume that the reasons for the Congregation's presence in Sedan did not include the conversion of Protestants. More routinely, however, he referred to a Protestant audience of inhabitants and was concerned to ensure that he advised his missionaries on how best to win over heretical listeners. Yet he was adamant that this could not be achieved by fanning unrest that would raise antagonism towards the missionaries - who were the most obvious manifestation of the restoration of the Catholic Church - and towards the crown which was sponsoring this. He argued, if conversions came, they were welcome, but they were primarily to be an indirect consequence, not to be directly pursued, of the missionary and parochial ministry that the Congregation delivered in Sedan. This, he reminded the Sedanese missionaries, 'is how the angels act with us; they inspire us to do good but do not pressure us to do it ... experience has shown me that we have greater influence over others by proceeding in this way than by urging them to adhere to our views and trying to get the better of them.'

Catechesis, which he understood as a form of preaching, was instrumental in de Paul's understanding of Christian formation. This led him to prior-

27 Drelincourt declared that he was not worried by the challenge that the Congregation presented to Protestant loyalties, because those of the true faith recognised their deception. However, he also declared that he wrote the Dialogues to provide ordinary Protestants with refutations of the missionaries' lies. Its fourth part consisted of a long defence of Calvinist sacramental doctrine, the sacraments being a staple and central element of the Congregation's didactic repertoire during missions. Dialogues familliers sur les principales objections des missionnaires de ce temps par Charles Drelincourt, Paris, 1648, preface (unpaginated); 'Car ces nouveaux disputateurs ressemblent aux mouches, qui reviennent toujours quoiqu'on les chasse et ne cessent jamais de vous importuner'.

28 Kilar et al. (eds.), Correspondence. Vol. 2, 495. de Paul to Guillaume Gallais, 13 February 1644.

29 Ibid., Vol. 8, 224-5, de Paul to Pierre Cabel, 17 December 1659.
itize catechetical instruction to an extent unusual among missionary groups at this time. This was partly because the Congregation’s missions were longer (ten days). However, it also held true in proportional terms, for they devoted at least two hours to it each day. In Sedan, as a result, the low-key approach to conversion was not simply a manifestation of realpolitik. Generally, both in sermons and catechetical sessions, de Paul advocated a straightforward and gentle style, and his confrères did not use theatrical techniques such as the ceremonial planting of crosses, public acts of penance like the trailing of the tongue along the ground of village squares, or dramatic enactments such as conversations with the dead using props that included skulls and fires— all woven as standard into the Jesuit and Capuchin missions. De Paul did not believe such external rituals to be efficacious either in effecting or demonstrating true conversion, although their proponents considered that they facilitated the interiorization of the missionary message of contrition and offered proof that it had been successfully transmitted to the penitents. Instead, he advocated a pedagogical approach that was rich in illustrative examples, but simple in language, and sequentially structured according to the motives for adopting a virtue, the means to do so, and the benefits accruing to those who


31 Bernard Dompnier, La Compagnie de Jésus et la mission de l’intérieur, in: Lucie Gallié/Louis de Vaucelles (eds), Les Jésuites et l’Age Baroque, Grenoble, 1996, 153–79. Bernard Peyrous suggests that over the eighteenth century other missionaries adopted the Vincentian format, but the evidence of David Gentilcore and others confirms that this claim is too sweeping. Even Alphonse de Liguori’s Redemptorists combined elements of the Jesuit and Vincentian approaches, while the Congregation of the Mission incorporated dramas such as the planting of the cross into their missions in the decades that followed de Paul’s death: David Gentilcore, ‘Adapt yourselves to the people’s capabilities’: missionary strategies, methods and impact in the Kingdom of Naples, 1600–1800’, Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 45, 2, 1994, 269–96; Mezzadri and Román, The Vincentians, 146–78; Bernard Peyrous, Saint Vincent de Paul et le renouvellement des missions paroissiales; Bulletin de la Société de Borda, 385, 1981, 568–84.

32 In the Jesuit ‘schools of mortification’ described by Jennifer Selwyn, penitential processions formed the centrepiece of a dramatic set of public corporal mortificatory acts, such as a bonfire of the vanities, the wearing of crowns of thorns and flagellation: Jennifer Selwyn, ‘Schools of mortification: theatricality and the role of penitential practice in the Jesuits’ popular missions’, in: Katherine Jackson Luard/Anne T. Thayer (eds.), Penitence in the Age of Reformations, Aldershot, 2000, 201–21; A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuits’ Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples, Aldershot, 2004, 21–42.
did. He understood this to express the Congregation’s ethos, or ‘spirit’, which he had devised in order to develop a distinct identity for the group and to foster a unity of purpose amongst its members. The basis of the Congregation’s ethos was a framework of Christ-like virtues, or values, which, while recognisably drawn from traditional Catholic theological teaching, were shaped to respond to the demands of evangelization in the Tridentine period. For de Paul, the confrères’ possession of these defining marks of identity, or ‘faculties of the soul of the Congregation’, demonstrated that they were instruments of God as they performed their vocational tasks. These signature virtues of their authentic ministry were humility, simplicity, zeal, gentleness and mortification, which were topped by the supreme virtue of charity, which the angelic doctor Thomas Aquinas had called the ‘most excellent’ of the three theological virtues. Charity embraced and enlivened other virtues because it actively demonstrated love of God and neighbour. For the Congregation, it was also the second ‘great virtue’ of Jesus Christ, the companion to his adoration of the Father, so that those who possessed it were clothed in his spirit, but empty of self. Citing Aquinas’s precept that perfection consisted in loving God and neighbour, de Paul concluded that ‘we should show [love] by bringing people to love God and the neighbour, to love the neighbour for God and God for the neighbour. We have been chosen by God as instruments of his immense, paternal charity’. Indeed, he went so far as to say that the Congregation was ‘a state of charity’, that is, a state of love for God, expressed in missionary service.

Trained in scholastic theology, de Paul knew that the doctrine of charity had a distinguished pedigree in Catholic tradition, most recently in the teaching propounded by the late celebrated Bishop François de Sales. Like many devout Catholics of the early seventeenth century, de Paul was enamoured with the teachings that de Sales had enunciated in the Introduction à la vie dévote, while he revealed in 1628 that de Sales’s second ‘noble work’, the Traité sur l’amour de Dieu, first published in 1616, was required reading for members of his community as a ‘universal remedy for all who are dispirited … an incentive to love, and

33 Kilar et al. (eds.), Correspondence, Vol. 13a, 438, ‘Common Rules’, 17 May 1658.
34 Ibid., Vol. 6, 415, Vincent de Paul to a Congregation priest, undated; ibid., 11, p. 311, ‘Advice to Antoine Durand’, 1656.
36 Ibid., Vol. 11, pp. 34–6.
a ladder for those striving for perfection'. 37 De Sales's emphasis on the practice of charity as a form of spiritualised effectivity offered the basis for de Paul's assumption that his missionaries should burn with charity as they ascended 'by steps' through the five missionary virtues. 38 Furthermore, it led him to agree with de Sales that the natural tendency of men was to turn towards and 'fasten onto' a loving God, so that de Paul optimistically anticipated that those who voluntarily chose to respond to God's invitation to obey him would be met with his merciful charity: 'God desires that everyone might be saved, and gives everyone the means for that; but, if they do not observe them, it is not God's fault, but theirs'. 39

As collective marks of identity, the missionary virtues determined the Congregation's approach to public ministry. De Paul realised that they could act as tools to win the goodwill of those who encountered his missionaries in parishes, and subsequently to encourage them to exercise their free will in God's favour. As he reminded a superior in Sedan, the people's obedience to God would be nurtured, not through the use of didactic artifices that manipulated people into submission, but through 'simplicity, uprightness, and firmness of mind', and through 'requests rather than any language that might smack of authority or demands'. 40 Their behaviour therefore should earn the admiration of locals, and would inspire them to adopt their faith and habits: 'good living and the good odour of the Christian virtues put into practice draw the black sheep back to the right path and confirm Catholics on it'. Exemplary living would give the missionaries the high moral ground that would entitle them to 'preach against vice and bad morals, [establish and encourage] the virtues, showing their necessity, their beauty, their practice and the means of acquiring them'. 41 Furthermore, when their virtues were actualised in the formal pedagogical contexts of sermons and catechesis, they would arouse a response amongst listeners, both to them and to God, so that ultimately the

37 Ibid., Vol. 13a, p. 84, 'Deposition at the Process of Beatification of François de Sales', 17 April 1628. The Introduction was first published in 1609.
39 ACMP. MS. 'De la grâce', fo 1v: 'Dieu desire que tout le monde soit sauvé, et donne des moyens à tous pour cela; mais, s'ils ne les observant, ce n'est pas la faute de Dieu, mais la leur'.
40 Kilar et al. (eds.), Correspondence, Vol. 6, 623, de Paul to Pierre Cabel, 17 November 1657.
41 Ibid., Vol. 1, 272–9, de Paul to Antoine Portail, 1 May 1635; Ibid., Vol. 11, 55, ‘Gentleness in Controversies’, undated.
evangeliser and evangelised would unite in a tripartite bond of charity with God. Listeners were to be touched by their teacher to the point where they were ready to personalize the virtues in making their submission to the divine will, thus emulating the charitable love that he proffered. De Paul believed that the main 'fruit of the mission' stemmed from the sustained inculcation of doctrine in the minds of the faithful, for knowledge of God's glory and the requirements of faith laid the basis for their commitment to piety. Indeed, it was in response to the lessons that they learned about sin, mercy and reconciliation that the layperson made the choice to obey God's will. But if neither de Paul nor his missionaries displayed true humility, simplicity and so on, then their words would lack their companion virtues, which placed their listeners in a state of readiness to turn freely to God.

It was, therefore, on the terrain of moral instruction that de Paul thought the missionaries would win the battle for hearts as well as minds, and it was in stoking up admiration for their ethical values and ability to live out the graceful virtues that they would win over Protestants and Catholics who were ignorant or lax in their practices. There was, he argued, nothing to be gained from tackling Protestants directly on doctrine, for François de Sales and he himself had seen that disputes only closed minds, hardened hearts and displayed a vanity in the protagonists that caused their audience to doubt their integrity:

If you have the desire to speak about some points of controversy, do not do it unless the Gospel of the day should lead you to it. And then you will be able to sustain and prove the truths which the heretics attack, and even respond to their arguments but without naming them or talking about them.

Of course, this was precisely what infuriated Charles Drelincourt, who was confident that their Protestant opponents could defeat the Catholic missionaries in the area of doctrine. But this was a debate in which the Congregation was not prepared to engage in Sedan, partly because the crown did not wish it to do so, but also because its missionaries were schooled to cross the boundary between the faiths through the language, concepts and conduct of virtue. Although foreign to Protestant patterns of communication with Catholics, this fitted neatly into the circumstances of Sedan's occupation. Because there were fewer grounds for disagreement between the faiths on the actual practice of basic moral principles and rules, many of which they held in common, these were therefore a far less fruitful area for attack and therefore less likely to evoke

42 Ibid., Vol. 1, 419, de Paul to Lambert aux Couteaux, 30 January 1638.
43 Ibid., Vol. 2, 445, de Paul to Guillaume Gallais, c.1643.
open antagonism. Indeed, the missionaries were told to expect that they would provoke admiration and emulation, which would translate into conversion and committed pious behaviour. While the extent to which the approach worked on the general population in the long term is beyond the scope of this chapter, this explains why the crown deliberately forged an alliance with the Congregation in Sedan during its transition from La Tour to Bourbon possession. Although the monarchy insisted that the political border between the region and the rest of France had been artificial and temporary, and was therefore easily dismantled, it could not discount the denominational frontier within Sedan itself, for it was both politically and religiously real and potentially the source of protest against the new regime. The crown's choice of de Paul's Congregation to act as the agent for French and Catholic influence testified to the particularity of Sedan, a territory in which religious strategy had to pay heed to the legacy of historical independence, rather than to the theoretical and officially perpetuated argument of reunion.