

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 71: The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion

Huguenots and the Wars of Religion: Did You Know?

Interesting & unusual facts about the Huguenots—and their enemies.

Hu-gue-what?

No one knows for sure how French Protestants got the nickname "Huguenots" (pronounced HYU-ghe-nahts in America, HYU-ghe-nos in Britain). One theory proposes that the word was derived from German *Eldgenosen*, "oath fellows," which was used to describe a Genevan political movement. Or perhaps a leader of that movement, Besancon Hughes, lent his name to the group. Scholar Janet Gray, however, supports a more colorful—and philologically sound—theory. In Tours, an early Protestant stronghold, a spirit called King Huguon was believed to haunt one of the city's gates at night. Protestants held their illegal religious services near the same gate after dark. According to a manuscript from 1566, "The one who derived *Huguenot* from *Huguon* was a monk who, in a sermon reproaching the Lutherans, as those who met at night were called, said that it was necessary henceforth to call them Huguenots because they went out at night like him."

Creed-crossed lovers

The [Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre](#) began soon after Protestant Henri of Navarre wed Catholic Marguerite of Valois. More than 400 years later, the prospect of a cross-confessional marriage once again sent shudders through the upper echelons of French society. In the summer of 2001, Chartres Cathedral was booked for the wedding of Duchess Tatjana d'Oldenbourg, a Protestant German aristocrat, and Jean d'Orléans, a Catholic noble who would be in line for the French crown if that country ever reinstated its monarchy. But even though Jean is heir to only a theoretical throne, his family opposed the marriage, fearing it would undermine their legitimacy. Jean broke off the engagement.

Stranger than fiction

Cardinal Richelieu (see "[Gallery](#)"), the Huguenots' worst enemy during the reign of Louis XIII, is famous as the bad guy in Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*. (A smarmy Tim Curry played him in the 1993 movie.) If Dumas had wanted to stock his novel with really outrageous characters, though, he should have included Richelieu's siblings. One of the cardinal's brothers at times believed himself to be the first member of the Trinity, and one of his sisters thought her posterior was made of glass.

Midnight ride of Paul de Rivoire?

Paul Revere's Huguenot parents may have changed their foreign-sounding moniker to better blend in with American society, but that didn't keep the Revolutionary hero from making a name for himself in his new homeland. Other famous Americans of Huguenot descent include:

"Swamp Fox" Francis Marion
Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton
Naturalist John James Audubon
President Theodore Roosevelt

Mixed-up monarch

If, after reading this issue, you're still not sure what to make of Henri IV—the French king who changed religions about as often as he changed his socks—don't fret. French historians and citizens have judged him in drastically different ways since his death in 1610. In his day some artists portrayed him as Hercules, Mars, Perseus, and Alexander, while some biographers cast him as a cross between Satan and the village idiot. In 1728 Voltaire extolled him in an epic poem *La Henriade*; in 1792 revolutionaries tore down his statue on the Pont Neuf in Paris. Perhaps historian Jules Michelet, writing in 1857 and reflecting the high Romanticism of his own era, came closest to an apt description: "He cried out of love, he cried out of friendship, and he cried out of compassion. But none of this made him any the more constant in anything." Today Henri is France's most beloved king.

Generation gap

A counselor to King Henri IV, politician and poet Agrippa d'Aubigné tirelessly promoted the Protestant cause (see "[Slaughter, Mayhem, and Providence](#)"). Partially as a result of d'Aubigné's influence, Henri's policies introduced broad toleration for the Huguenots. Unfortunately both Henri and d'Aubigné's son, Constant, abjured the Calvinist faith. In the next generation, d'Aubigné's grand-daughter married Henri's grandson Louis XIV, the king who put even more effort into expunging Protestantism from France than d'Aubigné had put into saving it.

Massacre—live onstage!

When Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* opened in Paris in 1836, reviewers had grave doubts. "[I]t was a bold and even hazardous attempt to bring such a subject as the religious disputes between the Catholics and the Huguenots, and the horrors attached to the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, within the range of the lyrical drama," one critic wrote. But most Parisians agreed that Meyerbeer, a Jew who sided with neither faction, managed the feat. "Any criticism would have to fall silent in the face of such an overwhelming success," a reviewer crowed. The show brought in 11,300 francs in its first two months—an unheard-of amount—and in 1900 became the first opera to rack up 1,000 performances.

Stamp of approval

Though commissioned for the 300th anniversary of one of the bleakest events in Huguenot history, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (see "[Escape from Babylon](#)"), this stamp proclaims "Welcome Huguenots." It also features the distinctive Huguenot cross. Each arm of the cross broadens and splits into two points. The eight total points represent the eight Beatitudes. The spaces between the arms are sometimes stylized as four hearts, representing loyalty, topped with four lilies, representing purity. The appendage, a dove, symbolizes the Holy Spirit.

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Escape from Babylon

As repression became a way of life in France, Huguenots faced three choices: convert, go underground, or risk everything to reach *le Refuge*.

Bertrand Van Ruymbeké

In 1684, having "suffered through eight months [of] exactions and quartering by the soldiery, for the religion with much evil," Judith Giton, a Huguenot from southern France, decided to escape. With her mother, two of her brothers, and a servant, she slipped away at night, leaving soldiers sleeping in the family bed.

The group traveled north along the Rhone and Rhine rivers to Holland and reached England in 1685. They stayed three months in London waiting for a Carolina-bound ship, then crossed the Atlantic under terrible conditions. Judith's mother died of scarlet fever, and a storm forced them to stop in Bermuda, where the captain, having "committed certain rascalities," was imprisoned and the ship seized. Penniless, Judith and her brothers indentured themselves to pay for their passage to South Carolina.

Once in Charleston, Judith endured "affliction ... sickness, pestilence, famine, [and] poverty," and her elder brother, Louis, died of a fever. After a few years, though, Judith "had it the way she wanted it" and thanked "God [for giving] her good grace to have been able to withstand all sorts of trials."

Judith's story contains many elements common to the Huguenot exodus: the quartering of troops, a night flight, a long and risky voyage filled with hardships and sorrows—but also survival, hope, freedom, and prosperity.

New Babylon

In the 1660s, France's King Louis XIV launched a crusade to convert his Protestant subjects to Catholicism. According to the powerful "one king, one faith" principle, the country's stability depended on the monarch and his people all following the same religion. For years legal and religious harassment alternated with financial measures to entice Huguenots back into the Catholic fold.

Huguenots, who often compared themselves to the remnant of Israel (see "[Slaughter, Mayhem, and Providence](#),"), felt that they were living in the New Babylon, ruled by an oppressive Nebuchadnezzar.

Early royal measures aimed to restrict Huguenots' freedom of worship. In 1663 Huguenots were told they could not conduct their funerals during the day, and the next year processions were limited to 10 people. Then the crown prohibited ministers from serving multiple churches, meaning that congregations too poor to hire a minister would die out. Laws also restricted psalm singing, one of the most distinctive aspects of Huguenot religious practice, outside the church—or even inside the church when a Catholic procession was passing by.

Church services came under royal surveillance and censorship. In each Huguenot temple, pews had to be reserved for Catholic observers, who were allowed to interrupt services and challenge the pastor.

In his memoirs, Jaques Fontaine, a Huguenot minister who fled to the British Isles, explained that

Capuchins and Jesuits came to listen to his father's sermons so regularly that "there was a bench especially marked for them in the temple ... just opposite the minister's seat."

In addition to people and practices, the monarchy targeted Huguenot property. Authorities tore down churches and imposed severe restrictions on cemeteries. By March 1685 the crown had ordered the closing of all five Huguenot *académies*, which meant that Calvinist ministers could no longer be trained in France.

Huguenots faced professional restrictions, too. They were excluded from the guilds of hosiery dealers in 1681, barbers and wigmakers in 1684, printers and booksellers in 1685. By then Protestants could no longer be notaries, bailiffs, apothecaries, midwives, surgeons, or doctors. They also could not keep Catholic servants.

"Booted missionaries"

Eventually Louis XIV lost his patience with passive coercion and turned to a military solution, the *dragonnades*. In these campaigns, Catholic soldiers called "dragoons" swarmed Protestant communities and attempted to force conversions to Catholicism. Huguenots called the troops "booted missionaries."

Dragoons placed enormous financial burdens on their Huguenot hosts. Fontaine had to entertain 18 of them, who lived in his home "until they had destroyed or sold everything, even the bolts on the doors."

When property attacks fell short of the goal, dragoons inflicted physical and emotional abuse. A letter from Thomas Bureau, a bookseller from Poitou, to his brother in London details the escalating persecutions.

"As soon as the dragoons were in town," Bureau wrote, "four were sent to our home. ... They threw all the books on the floor ... destroyed the carpentry work, the stacks, the windows with axes and hammers, brought their horses inside the shop, used the books as litter, then they climbed upstairs to our bedrooms and threw everything that was inside them into the streets as the mayor watched ... filled with joy."

Aggravated by the steadfast determination of Bureau's mother and sister, the dragoons threatened "to hang them ... or tie them to the harnesses of their horses and drag them through the streets like rabid dogs to serve as examples." As threats were not enough, four more dragoons were assigned to the home. They took all of the family's books to a square in the town to be burned.

The violence got results. Huguenots were terrified. Sometimes entire communities converted at the local Catholic church before the dragoons even reached town.

From bad to worse

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 made the Huguenots' already desperate situation even worse. With this act, Louis XIV outlawed Protestantism, leaving the 700,000 Huguenots still living in France three choices: convert, enter the underground church, or flee. The last two choices carried the risk of death.

Often when a European power outlawed a religion, it ordered adherents to leave the country. France, however, forbade Huguenots to leave—except pastors, who were given two weeks to relocate or convert. Protestants who refused to abjure, who attended illegal services, or who were caught leaving the kingdom could be imprisoned, sentenced to the galleys, deported to the Caribbean, or even executed.

Most Huguenots, about 500,000, avoided these risks by renouncing their faith. As long as the ecclesiastical and civil authorities let them be passive Catholics, these "New Converts" lived with practical compromises. Huguenot theologians recognized Catholic baptism. Converts agreed to be married by Catholic priests as

long as they were not forced to take Communion beforehand, meaning the ceremony was more a civil than a sacramental affair. On the threshold of death, converts refused the last rites and died as Calvinists.

Of the 200,000 Huguenots who fought their fate, about 10,000 were sentenced between 1685 and 1787. Nearly 4,000 of these were women, and most (6,500) were imprisoned. From 1685 to 1715, about 1,500 Huguenots were sentenced to life in the galleys. More than half of these were charged for attending illegal religious services and nearly one-fourth for attempting to leave France.

Even Huguenots who had already settled in a foreign country could be captured by French privateers and sent to the galleys. For example, *élie Néau*, a New York Huguenot merchant, was taken prisoner while crossing the Atlantic on a business trip in 1692. He remained in the galleys until his release in 1698.

In 1687 and 1688 alone, more than 400 Huguenots were deported to the West Indies. Conditions on the transport ships were horrific, and the death rate averaged 25 percent. If the deportees made it to Guadeloupe, Martinique, or Saint-Domingue, however, most found ways to escape to an English or Dutch island and eventually sail back to Europe.

To flee or not to flee

The French crown cracked down especially hard on Huguenots who tried to leave the country. A 1669 decree sentenced fugitives to confiscation of property and death. Other laws condemned those who helped Huguenots escape. On the other hand, Catholics who denounced Huguenots preparing to flee or who helped catch fugitives got the rights to one third of the victims' property. The guards who made the arrest shared the rest of the estate.

Still, a determined minority of the Protestant community risked all to reach *le Refuge*.

The first Huguenot refugees left France during persecutions in the 1500s. This emigration was small, occasional, and very often led only to temporary exile. Most early refugees, including John Calvin, fled to nearby Protestant cities, mainly Geneva and Strasburg. Others traveled to England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. A few trekked overseas to *la Florida* under the leadership of captain Jean Ribault in 1562. No more than 20,000 Huguenots left France between 1520 and 1660.

The late-seventeenth century exodus, in contrast, was massive, brief, and permanent. Historians estimate that about 180,000 Huguenots left France between 1680 and 1705. The movement started with the intensification of the persecutions in 1680, peaked between 1684 and 1687, and then dwindled in the 1690s, except for occasional outbreaks.

Fugitives fled primarily to preserve their Calvinism—"to live and die in the true religion," as a South Carolina Huguenot wrote in his will. Yet many other factors entered in.

Different locations had very different emigration rates. Huguenots who lived in overwhelmingly Catholic provinces were more prone to leave than those who lived where the concentration of Protestants made persecution less painful and resistance easier to organize. Huguenots who lived in large cities or near the coast or the borders could escape at lower cost and lesser risk than those in the rural interior.

Personal and familial factors also affected the decision to flee. Huguenots who held occupations that became legally limited to Catholics had to leave or convert simply to survive economically. Flight appealed more to young people than to old, because it often required travel over long distances without the aid of horses or coaches. Even education was a factor, for a person who knew little geography or could not read a map might never reach safety.

Getting away, staying close

Resolving to abandon relatives, friends, and the comfort of home was undoubtedly difficult, but making that decision was easy compared to carrying it out. Escaping from France required courage, perseverance, ingenuity, and luck—plus plenty of money and contacts.

Fugitives paid guides, who knew how to safely reach the coast or the border, and fishermen, who provided passage to an English or Dutch ship anchored off a French harbor. Fugitives also bought maps with itineraries and lists of inns and homes where Protestants were welcome. Leftover funds were saved to bribe coast and border guards, just in case.

When choosing a destination, most refugees followed the simplest route. Huguenots who lived in northwestern France fled to England. Those who were from the Atlantic seaboard escaped to either England or the Netherlands following well-known maritime trade routes. Huguenots from southern and eastern France usually took the Swiss route, following the Rhine River to the Netherlands or settling in the German states.

Ready employment and established exile communities attracted many Huguenots to large foreign cities, some of which wooed the fleeing Protestants with promotional documents. German decrees guaranteed Huguenots generous religious, economic, and linguistic privileges, while colonial pamphlets promised abundant land, free naturalization, and freedom of worship. Because most displaced Huguenots possessed education and labor skills, they were embraced nearly everywhere.

The overwhelming majority of refugees remained in Europe—about 65,000 in the Netherlands, 60,000 in the British Isles, 30,000 in the German states (half in Prussia), and 25,000 in Switzerland. Most hoped to return to France once Louis XIV was defeated by his Protestant enemies and forced to reestablish the Edict of Nantes.

But the Treaty of Ryswick, signed in 1697 to end a nearly 10-year-old war involving France, England, Spain, and the Netherlands, dashed these hopes. It left the French monarchy's domestic religious policy intact, meaning the Huguenots were still unwelcome at home.

The ones who disappeared

The longer the Huguenots remained shut out of France, the more they adapted to their new countries. This was especially true among those who settled in British North America. Yale historian Jon Butler argues that they essentially disappeared.

For a long time, scholars estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 Huguenots settled in the American colonies. Thanks notably to Butler's work, however, that estimate has been revised down considerably.

Even including the eighteenth-century Huguenot communities of Purrysburgh and New Bordeaux in South Carolina, no more than 4,000 refugees are likely to have settled in North America from the 1670s to the 1770s. This number is large compared to the 200 who settled in the Dutch colony of South Africa but represents only a tiny fraction of the total refugee population.

Huguenots founded settlements in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Virginia, and South Carolina. New England Huguenots settled in Boston, Oxford, and in the Narragansett Bay. In New York they established communities in New York City (where they joined a few Walloons, French-speaking Protestants from the southern Netherlands), Staten Island, New Rochelle, and in New Paltz, also a Walloon-Huguenot settlement. In Virginia, they founded the community of Manakintown near Richmond, and in South Carolina, they settled in Charleston, Orange Quarter, and Santee.

Roughly 800 refugees settled in New York, 700 in Virginia, 500 in South Carolina, and 300 in New England. The rest dispersed between New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina.

Once settled, Huguenot families strove to blend in with their new communities. Their identification with the remnant of Israel quickly faded.

Most of the refugees' children abandoned Calvinism and the use of the French language. Except in the cases of Charleston and New York City, where the refugees managed to keep their congregations active through most of the eighteenth century, most Huguenot churches remained Calvinist only through the 1720s. In Manakintown, Virginia, the colony was founded with the stipulation that all settlers would immediately join the Church of England.

In New York Huguenots joined the Dutch Reformed and the Anglican churches. In New England a few became Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In South Carolina nearly all refugees, except those in Charleston, became Anglicans.

The new Americans also proved eager to participate in local politics and the economy. They obtained large amounts of land, abandoned their traditional occupations to take up agriculture, and intermarried with British and Dutch settlers. They even Anglicized their names.

In every country of *le Refuge*, however, including America, Huguenot identity re-emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. This new identity, best conveyed by the Huguenot Societies founded in New York, South Carolina, Great Britain, and Germany between 1883 and 1890, represents a durable legacy. Two hundred years after the French king revoked their freedoms and took their property, Huguenots came out of hiding and began to search for what they had lost.

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Huguenots and the Wars of Religion: From the Editor - Fracas Francais

Elesha Coffman

Because of our journalistic focus, *Christian History* always zooms in on part of a topic, exploring some stories while leaving others untouched. But rather than use this space give a nod to all we didn't mention, I'm going to zoom in even further on a phrase that appears only once: The War of the Three Henris. It's a microcosm of the battles waged on these pages.

To begin with the smallest controversy, there was the question of name spellings. We tried to use French spellings (Henri instead of Henry, for example), though often our sources disagreed with one another. Minor inconsistencies were pretty much unavoidable.

Even when we got names spelled "right," it wasn't always clear to whom they referred. The issue features five Henris, two kings named Louis, two dukes of Guise, two princes of Condé, and two Médicis women who became queen regent of France. A name and a title found in separate references could designate the same person.

Furthermore, when discussing wars, it's usually helpful to start with who was fighting whom over what. That wasn't always clear, either.

The three Henris who fought each other between 1587 and 1589 represent the three factions involved in the French Wars of Religion. Henri I de Lorraine, who was also a duke of Guise, led the ultra-Roman Catholic faction. Henri of Navarre led the Protestant party. Henri III, king of France and head of the royalist camp, played politics between them.

This war followed the pattern of the preceding seven religious conflicts: parties won and lost key cities, foreign nations meddled, a few nobles got killed, one disputant (Henri III) had another one (Henri, duke of Guise) assassinated, and the agreements that were supposed to end the conflict dissatisfied everyone.

What made the War of the Three Henris different from the earlier wars was its finality (although Henri of Navarre kept fighting to succeed Henri III, who was murdered in 1589, until 1593). This peace lasted because, for good or ill, the sole surviving Henri straddled all of the factions: he converted to Catholicism, became king, and gave the Huguenots legal protection.

No church memberships or crowns were swapped in the production of this issue, but Henri's attempt to see all sides of a complicated struggle proved instructive. Though the Huguenots were more sinned against than sinning, that's neither the whole story nor the end of it. The jump from microcosm to wide-angle picture only proves John Calvin's words, "Nothing belongs more peculiarly to God than the office of judging the world."

The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre

Suspicious and scared, the king of France ordered a political assassination. Then the real killing began.

Scott M. Manetsch

Before dawn on the morning of August 24, 1572, church bells tolled in the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois quarter of Paris. Just moments earlier, soldiers under the command of Henri, duke of Guise, had overcome resistance and assassinated the admiral of France, Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny, in his bedroom. They threw the body from the window to the ground below, where angry crowds later mutilated it, cutting off the head and hands, and dragged it through the streets of Paris. As Guise walked away from Coligny's lodging, he was overheard to say "it is the king's command."

The killing unleashed an explosion of popular hatred against Protestants throughout the city. In the terrible days that followed, some 3,000 Huguenots were killed in Paris, and perhaps another 8,000 in other provincial cities.

This season of blood—known as the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre—decisively ended Huguenot hopes to transform France into a Protestant kingdom. It remains one of the most horrifying episodes in the Reformation era.

The dangerous decade

Historians have long debated the causes of the massacres of 1572. Drawing upon Francis Hotman's *De Furoribus Gallicis* (1573), Protestant interpreters since the sixteenth century have often portrayed Coligny and his coreligionists as heroic victims of a premeditated plot to destroy the Huguenot movement, masterminded by the wicked queen mother, Catherine de Médicis.

Catholic historians, on the other hand, have usually followed the royal interpretation that the king, Charles IX, issued two days after the violence began. In this view, the king and his council ordered the violence as a justified preemptive strike to protect the Catholic crown from a Protestant revolt.

Although differences remain, historians today are in general agreement that the massacres can only be understood in light of the dangerous political developments and seething religious resentments of the preceding decade.

The premature death, following a jousting accident, of King Henri II in 1559 created a protracted political crisis in France. His sons who succeeded him in turn—Francis II (1559-60), Charles IX (1560-74), and Henri III (1574-89)—were young and weak, subject to their ambitious mother, and vulnerable to manipulation by powerful noble factions.

The explosive growth of Protestantism in France only exacerbated this dangerous political situation. By 1562, there were perhaps two million Protestants and nearly 1,250 Reformed churches in France, flourishing despite repeated royal censures and harsh persecution.

"We have churches in nearly all the cities of the realm," boasted Jean Morély, "and soon there will be scarcely a place where one has not been established." Such unbridled optimism was shattered by the

onset of war in the spring of 1562. Nonetheless, the powerful Protestant party remained a dangerous factor in the French political crisis.

For the next decade, Catherine and Charles IX struggled feebly between two competing noble factions. The Huguenot party was championed by the admiral Coligny, Louis of Condé (until his death in 1569), and the young Bourbon princes Henri of Navarre and Henri of Condé. It sought legal recognition and freedom of worship for the Reformed churches. The Catholic faction, led by the powerful Guise family, defended the time-honored French tradition of "one king, one faith, one law" and demanded the extermination of the Protestant heresy.

Violence radicalized both Catholic and Huguenot positions and fueled popular resentments. During the decade before Saint Bartholomew's Day, France was ravaged by three successive religious wars. The first war of religion began in April 1562, shortly after Francis, duke of Guise, and his soldiers slaughtered some 60 Protestants who were worshiping in a barn at Vassy.

The war ended a year later in a military stalemate when Francis himself fell to an assassin's bullet. The Guise family promised to avenge his death by killing Coligny, whom they suspected (probably incorrectly) of ordering the assassination. This rhythm of sectarian violence and retribution recurred in the second (1567-68) and third (1568-70) religious wars, as well as in hundreds of local riots and massacres.

Historian Natalie Zemon Davis has noted that in religious riots Huguenots tended to attack property, while Catholics more frequently attacked people. Nevertheless, both groups used deadly force.

Protestant crowds pillaged and desecrated churches, smashed Catholic images, and assaulted priests and monks. At a riot at Saint Médard's Church in 1561, they paraded through the streets, chanting "The Gospel, the Gospel; where are the idolatrous priests?"

Catholic crowds, in turn, showered insults and stones on Huguenot neighbors, burned Protestant Bibles and books, and disrupted Reformed worship services to cleanse their towns of the pollution of heresy. Sometimes they took more drastic measures, incited by inflammatory sermons or placards. One placard posted in Paris in 1566 proclaimed, "Cut them down. ... burn them. ... kill them without a qualm."

Massacres spawned by such sectarian hatred became increasingly common. In the months prior to Saint Bartholomew's Day, angry mobs massacred Protestants in Orange, Rouen, Troyes, and Dieppe. The French king was powerless to stop the violence.

Prelude to massacre

On Monday, August 18, 1572, the Protestant prince Henri of Navarre married Margaret of Valois, the sister of King Charles IX, in a lavish ceremony in Paris' Notre Dame cathedral. In the week that followed, French notables indulged in sumptuous banquets, formal balls, and colorful tournaments. Protestant nobles in the entourage of Navarre, Coligny, and Condé were welcomed guests at the wedding and walked freely about the city.

The monarchy hoped that this marriage alliance of Valois and Bourbon would help to heal sectarian hatred and end a decade of civil war. Nevertheless, religious tensions remained high.

Catholic preachers had long threatened the terrible judgment of heaven if the marriage took place. As Bishop Simon Vigor reportedly preached, "God will not endure this detestable union!" Catholics suspected that the royal marriage indicated the king's willingness to work with sworn enemies and heretics.

This rapprochement between the crown and the Huguenots had ominous political implications as well. It appeared that Charles now endorsed Coligny's plan to "export" the French religious wars to the Netherlands by sending a united force against the Spanish armies of the duke of Alva, which were attacking Dutch Protestants on the northern frontier of France.

From a Catholic perspective, both the unwelcomed marriage and Coligny's influence at court in the summer of 1572 threatened to bring not peace, but war with arch-rival Spain. The pageantry and festivities surrounding the royal wedding did not quiet these lurking fears and deep resentments.

The uneasy calm was shattered on Friday morning, August 22. A would-be assassin named Maurevert fired two shots from a window, wounding Coligny in the right hand and left arm as he returned from a meeting with the king. The admiral's companions rushed him to the safety of his lodging, where other Huguenot leaders soon joined him.

The king and his council visited the admiral at his bedside later in the afternoon. They found the Huguenots angry and distrustful, demanding prompt royal action and threatening vengeance. Coligny and his company found little consolation in Charles IX's repeated promises to find and punish the attacker. Rumors of the assassination attempt and the angry Huguenot reaction spread quickly through the streets of Paris, deepening the climate of suspicion, fear, and hatred.

Historians have usually accused Catherine de Médicis of hiring Maurevert to kill Coligny. They argue that the queen mother was envious of the admiral's influence over her son Charles and wished to avert war with Spain. Other historians have suggested that Maurevert acted alone or was hired by the duke of Alva. More likely (though impossible to prove), the assassination was ordered by one or more members of the Guise family, seeking to satisfy the longstanding vendetta against Coligny. Regardless of motive, the abortive attack was the fuse that detonated the general massacre two days later.

In an emergency session of the royal council on Saturday evening, August 23, the king, his brother Henri, duke of Anjou, Catherine, and other trusted advisers concluded that the Huguenot leaders should be killed. Primary responsibility for the assassinations was given to the royal guard and to the soldiers of Anjou, under the command of Henri, duke of Guise, and the duke of Aumale.

That same evening, the king ordered the mayor to close the city gates, chain boats on the Seine, and mobilize the militia. Sources are unclear whether the council's decision was due to panic, resulting from a real or imagined Huguenot plot, or a calculated attempt to annihilate or weaken the Huguenot leadership in view of impending civil war. What is almost certain, however, is that the plan was not premeditated, but a response to the crisis created by Maurevert's assault on Coligny. Likewise, the council clearly did not anticipate the mob violence unleashed by the royally sanctioned murders.

The season of blood

The killing began around 4 a.m. After assassinating Coligny, the royal guard turned on other Huguenot leaders. Some were executed by the sword, still rubbing sleep from their eyes. Others were shot by harquebuses as they tried to flee. A few died with sword in hand. In the Louvre, the Bourbon princes Navarre and Condé were placed under house arrest as 30 of their companions were cut down in cold blood.

By dawn the city militia and Catholic extremists had started a prolonged orgy of murder and looting. Mobs attacked Protestants in their homes, indiscriminately slaughtering men, women, and children. Victims were stabbed, shot, or beaten to death; their bloodied bodies were often dismembered, dragged through the streets, and thrown into the Seine. Vigilante bands searched for suspected Protestants and looted their homes and shops.

Despite royal pleas for calm, the violence continued in Paris for almost a week. In this season of blood, Hotman noted bitterly, Huguenot-hunting became a popular sport.

The violence soon spread to other cities in the kingdom. In Orléans the massacres began on August 26. Catholic extremists herded Protestants to the city wall and slaughtered them, mocking their victims by chanting the opening verse of Psalm 43: "Vindicate me, O God. ... and rescue me from wicked men." In two days, around 1,000 men, women, and children were killed.

In Lyon, city officials placed Protestants under protective custody in the city's convents and jails on August 29. Two days later, crowds broke in and massacred the prisoners by sword, strangulation, and drowning. Witnesses reported that the Rhone River flowed red with several thousand mutilated corpses.

Nearly a dozen other French cities witnessed deadly violence from August to late October, among them Rouen, Saumur, Bourges, Meaux, Bordeaux, and Toulouse. The horror of these months is captured in a Genevan diplomatic dispatch from the period: "The whole of France is bathed in the blood of innocent people and covered with dead bodies. The air is filled with the cries and groans of nobles and commoners, women and children, slaughtered by the hundreds without mercy."

Many Protestants managed to escape. Some found refuge in the Huguenot strongholds of Sancerre and La Rochelle. Thousands of others fled the kingdom, bound for Geneva, Basel, Strasburg, or London. The refugees brought with them stories of shocking brutality and extraordinary courage.

A young boy—the future duke of La Force—feigned death on a Parisian street for several hours beneath the corpses of his father and brother. A Catholic man finally found the blood-covered boy and hid him in his home until he could be brought to safety.

Equally dramatic was the account of Pierre Merlin, Coligny's chaplain. At the admiral's side moments before his death, Merlin fled to a barn and hid in a hayloft three days, narrowly avoiding the probing swords of soldiers searching for him. Thereafter, Merlin and his family found refuge in the household of a noblewoman, who brought them out of Paris in her coach.

As these stories attest, some Protestants survived due to the assistance of Catholic neighbors, who risked their lives to protect the hunted Huguenots.

In the months following Saint Bartholomew's Day, thousands of Protestants recanted their faith. For some, this was a temporary compromise, extracted by torture or mortal danger. For others, it was a permanent decision to abandon a religious cause that now seemed hopeless.

One eyewitness reported more than 5,000 abjurations in Paris alone by the end of September. Even the Bourbon princes Navarre and Condé submitted to threats and (temporarily) converted to Catholicism. Reformed leaders were stunned. Theodore Beza remarked, "The number of apostates almost defies counting!"

Evidence suggests that not all of these conversions were simply the product of fear or cowardice. At least some Protestants were shocked by God's apparent indifference to their plight and viewed the slaughter as divine judgment against them. For Protestants, the brutal massacre raised haunting questions: Why did God remain silent? Had God rejected his Church? These questions remained long after the massacres ended in late October 1572.

As the violence ebbed, both Catholic and Protestant writers attempted to describe and interpret the season of bloodshed. Catholics in Rome and Spain celebrated news of the massacres. The pope even issued a special medallion to commemorate the "holy" event. For many, the death of so many "heretics"

was a miracle—a conclusion that seemed confirmed by the appearance of the great nova in the night sky in November.

By contrast, Protestant authors recast the horrifying events of 1572 as the age-old story of the "elect" people of God struggling against Satan and his minions. Despite terrible suffering and sorrow, a remnant would remain; God's people would be vindicated. Protestants like Beza clung to this hope: "The Church never triumphs except under the cross."

The massacres in retrospect

Saint Bartholomew's Day dramatically altered the political and religious landscape of France. The Huguenots lost many of their chief nobles and military leaders. Navarre remained alive but discredited; it would take him over a decade to win back the trust and support of his coreligionists. The Huguenot cause seemed to be, in the words of one contemporary, "absolutely defeated."

The massacres also perpetuated—and intensified—the cycle of violence and warfare in France. Only weeks after Coligny's death, Catholic forces initiated the fourth War of Religion by laying siege to Protestant strongholds at Sancerre and La Rochelle. Huguenot assemblies in southern France subsequently rebelled against royal authority, laying the foundation for a revolutionary "state within a state."

Political pamphlets written by Huguenot authors such as Francis Hotman, Theodore Beza, and Lambert Daneau provided justification (and encouragement) for such acts of resistance. They argued that kings who committed manifest tyranny forfeited their "contract" to rule and could be resisted by inferior magistrates in the kingdom.

In the decades following Saint Bartholomew's Day, the Huguenots never again trusted the Valois kings. France was shaken by four more religious wars. Reformed churches struggled for survival in a climate of repression, political instability, and social unrest. Although Huguenots welcomed the Edict of Nantes (1598) and the restricted freedoms it promised, they recognized that prospects for reform had been decisively curtailed. Protestants would remain an unpopular minority, living "under the cross" in Catholic France.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Order in the Church

Reforming doctrine was just the beginning of a vigorous campaign to restructure Christian life—at church, at home, and in each believer's heart.

Raymond A. Mentzer

On Friday morning, March 31, 1542, the wife of sheath-maker Louis Pyaget appeared before the Geneva consistory to make an account of her faith. According to records, she "[s]aid she has a daughter who knows her faith better than she, and she did not know it except in Latin as in former times, and in the French language she could not say her creed; in Latin in a general way. And she does not know it in another language and does not understand it otherwise, and as for the sermons she has not frequented them."

What was the meaning of the Reformation for ordinary, largely illiterate men and women in France and nearby city-states such as Geneva? How do we interpret the plight of a distraught woman who, like Madame Pyaget, was raised Catholic and admitted that she was unable to "comprehend anything, no matter how much they instructed her" in the new religion and its practices? In what ways did the Protestant innovations seek to transform her daily life?

The Huguenots restructured ritual and ecclesiastical institutions in order to teach the essentials of Christian doctrine and nurture proper conduct. While people's receptivity varied, church leaders tenaciously pursued a broad reform of everyday behavior and lifestyle, which, in their minds, completed the reform of theology.

Instruction and rebuke

The Reformed churches labored to convey the truths of Christianity primarily through sermon services and catechism lessons. The congregation gathered each week for the Sunday morning sermon, focusing on God's truth as contained in Scripture and Scripture alone.

Children and some parents also assisted at afternoon catechism sermons, which were typically based on John Calvin's published catechism. Adults attended additional catechism lessons in the days leading up to each of the four annual celebrations of the Lord's Supper—at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and in early September.

Church officials expected congregants to memorize the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. Failure to partake of the liturgy or the inability to recite one's prayers drew immediate attention from the consistory.

When Jehan de Carro stumbled over the prayer and confession before the Geneva consistory in December 1542, he was advised "that he should come to instruction to know whether he will be given Communion, and before he comes to Communion he should come here Thursday and go to the catechism on Sundays and frequent the sermons; otherwise he will be rigorously punished."

Every local Reformed church possessed a consistory. It was a supervisory body, which, depending upon the size of the congregation, had one or more pastors, between a half dozen and a dozen elders, and several deacons.

The lay elders and deacons gathered with the pastor according to an established schedule, usually once a week in urban centers, every other week or less in rural areas. With the pastor serving as moderator, they conferred on details of church administration, oversaw the distribution of aid to the poor, and discussed various breaches of Christian conduct that had come to their attention.

The elders, in particular, shouldered heavy responsibility for monitoring proper behavior. They watched over the congregation, ensuring that the faithful lived and worshiped according to acceptable religious and moral standards. Larger churches usually divided the town into administrative districts and assigned an elder to each.

The elders regularly reported to the consistory on the various misdeeds—absence from services, Sabbath breach, quarrels, fornication, dancing, playing games, and the like—that had taken place within their assigned neighborhoods since the group's previous meeting. They also kept "dishonor roles," listing those whose failings were especially grievous or who balked when ordered to perform public repentance. The elders were expected to visit every family within their districts on an annual basis.

Toward a godly society

The behavioral goals to which Reformed churches and their consistories aspired reveal, in important ways, the Huguenots' monumental attempt to eradicate what they considered a corrupt and superstitious medieval culture, instituting a godly society in its place. In everything, the Reformed churches strove to observe biblical guidance, especially the Ten Commandments.

Worship followed an established schedule and acquired an educational character. The faithful sat quietly in pews (a recent introduction) and listened attentively. No longer could people wander about, as they had at some medieval services.

The church further forbade the conduct of business on Sunday. The consistory chastised a farmer, for example, for hauling grain on the Sabbath and others for conducting business in their shops.

Contamination by contact with an ungodly world, and with Catholics, concerned the reformers deeply. Sorcerers and fortune-tellers, a common feature of that society, were deemed threatening and summarily chased from Huguenot towns and villages. Persons who traveled to Catholic cities were often questioned when they returned. The mere appearance of a rosary in Geneva in May 1542 caused a number of women to be summoned by the consistory, which did not drop the matter until the rosary was found and confiscated.

The Huguenots' desire to eliminate Catholic excesses led, for example, to a furious offensive against dancing. Officials punished more people for dancing than for sexual immorality. Why? Not only did dancing entail provocative gestures and immodest ditties, but it was often associated with Catholic, and hence "idolatrous," religious customs such as votive festivals.

Other activities aroused condemnation both for their unhealthy effects on individuals and for the possibility that their pursuit would bring scandal on the Reformed church. Blasphemy and other offensive language obviously had no place in Huguenot communities. Neither did risqué dress, extravagant makeup, ornate hairdos, dice and cards, drink, or idle distractions such as tennis and bowling. Even mildly athletic games such as quoits or skittle smacked of indolence, while playing cards and throwing dice could involve wagering and thus constituted avarice.

"Every family a church"

Huguenots focused reform efforts on family life as well. "Every family of the pious ought to be a Church," Calvin said, and his followers took him seriously. Everything from sexual comportment and marriage contracts to childrearing and domestic squabbles came under the consistory's scrutiny.

Couples had to honor betrothal vows, publish marital banns (announcements of the intent to marry), refrain from marrying close relatives, and obtain parental permission to wed. Men and women living together without benefit of holy matrimony were told to marry immediately.

Consistories invariably summoned and punished women who became pregnant out of wedlock—and, if known, their partners. Still, individuals accused of sexual misconduct tended to be women, and the slightest hint of sexual impropriety led to consistorial investigation. An unmarried washerwoman named Claudaz was imprisoned in Geneva because she was accused of being pregnant; she was freed only after appearing before the consistory three times to protest that she had been falsely accused.

Though less obvious than sexual misconduct, discord within families also attracted the church's watchful gaze. Consistories promptly investigated reports of married couples living apart or fighting, and they frequently exhorted such couples to "live together in peace as they promised God in front of the church, and to frequent the sermons."

Intergenerational conflicts, too, aroused authorities' attention, for Calvin's statement, "Piety toward parents is the mother of all virtues," applied equally to young and adult children. The consistory of one village scolded a married woman for her "irreverent" treatment of her father. Several men at another town were told on various occasions to obey and honor their mothers and to cease "annoying" them.

An oasis of peace

Above all, the Huguenot community was determined to reduce strife and aggression, simultaneously promoting the settlement of disputes and fostering public peace. Pastors, elders, and deacons believed it their duty to promote Christian harmony.

Quarrels, both verbal squabbles and physical brawls, were frequent. Men called one another thief and cheat, cowardly and dumb. They would raise fists, throw stones, brandish sticks and swords, and draw pistols.

Although quarreling was largely a male offense, women fought too. Female insults concentrated on a woman's sexual virtue. A widow slandered her neighbor, intimating that the woman had several pregnancies prior to her marriage.

Once an old man caught his daughter in the act of robbing his house. When he resisted, she sent him to the floor with a quick punch.

Reformed pastors and elders went to great lengths to settle these animosities. The consistory demanded solemn promises that the combatants would forget past differences and live henceforth in peace and friendship.

Feuding parties "extended the hand of friendship" and promised to live amicably. Disputants were told to "forget the past," reconcile and shake hands. Mediating conflict always ranked highly among the Huguenots' objectives.

It is somewhat difficult to reconcile this emphasis with the fact that the Huguenots engaged in a protracted, bloody series of wars with their Catholic neighbors. Religious leaders took note of the violence, of course, but they tended to characterize the conflict as defensive—the safeguard of the one

true religion from its diabolical opponents.

Still, many Huguenots, especially those from the ranks of the nobility, must have appeared too enthusiastic in their pursuit of war, though the church refrained from chastising them explicitly.

From ideals to reality

The success of this effort to reform society is difficult to judge. It certainly had plenty of detractors.

A law clerk complained that if he wanted "auricular confession" he would convert to Catholicism. A student challenged the consistory to explain by what "Scriptural authority" it presumed to interrogate him, while a notary labeled the entire system no more than a "human invention."

Apparently they had heeded their pastors' counsel to read Holy Writ and were astonished to find no mention of the consistory.

Most people, however, complied and reoriented their lives. At the very least, most members of the French Reformed churches attended services regularly, knew their catechism, and shared in the Lord's Supper four times a year—up from their medieval ancestors' once-yearly participation.

Although measuring changes in demeanor is tricky, anecdotal evidence offers a few clues. A woman could not forgive a cobbler for "gravely offending and injuring" her. Unable to "soften her heart," she hesitated to participate in the Lord's Supper because of a "heavy conscience."

A man absented himself "voluntarily" due to his acrimonious litigation with another member of the congregation. Others refrained because of ongoing quarrels and rancorous squabbles with business associates, neighbors, and relatives.

Though faults remained, these believers had internalized Reformed religious ideals and applied them to their daily lives. The Reformation touched them in profound and enduring ways.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Getting Serious About Sin

No misdeed went unpunished in Calvin's Geneva.

Madame Pyaget wasn't the only resident of Geneva called to testify before the consistory on March 31, 1542. The city fathers, led by Lord Egrege Porralis and including John Calvin and Pierre Viret, heard all sorts of cases, as reported in these excerpts from the daily register:

Jaques Emyn

Summoned to render an account of his faith. He responded that he had made a little progress and said the Pater, "Our Father, etc.," and a few words of the creed. The Consistory advise [sic], having given him proper admonitions, that he find a teacher who will instruct him in the faith and explain what the words mean and make him understand what concerns God.

Jaquemaz, widow of Claude Camparet

Asked about frequenting of sermons, etc., and about the child her son has had by her maid. Answers that she has put the child out to nurse. Asked about her faith, she says the Pater in the new Reformed manner, but does not know the Credo. And that she has nursed her husband six years in illness and that her son [incomplete sentence]. And that she was at the sermon Sunday morning and that she believes it was Monsieur Calvin. And that she does not know about her son.

Master Tyvent Laurent, called Echaquet, citizen

Asked about the wizard he had in his house and why. Answers he never had one, except a man from Challex who attended his wife who was sick, and he said he would cure her. And that he often came to his house and would give him herbs to dissolve in wine, which was not done at his house. And that the man owed him money and that he came for no other reason.

Donne Jane Pertennaz

sked about her faith and why she has not received Holy Communion and whether she has heard and gone to Mass every year. And she said her faith and that she believes in one God and wants to live in God and the holy church and has no other faith. ...

Asked why she is not satisfied with the Communion celebrated in this city but goes elsewhere. Answers that she goes where it seems good to her. And that there is talk of princes who are not in accord in what they do openly, but they must be obeyed. And that Our Lord will not come here well-clothed or shod [reference to Matt. 11:708 or Luke 7:24-25] and that where His Word is, His body is. ... Remanded as outside the faith and to appear day by day. And she did not want to renounce the Mass.

Mermeta Jappaz

Said she is pregnant by the son of Berthelomier Fouson, named Bezanson, and she already felt the child at Christmas, and this was at the said Fouson's house. And she did not say her Pater well, and she goes to sermons on Monday and other days not. And she wants to give it to its father, and her mother knows

nothing, and she has had another child. And the other child was put to nurse and died. Remanded to [incomplete sentence]. The Consistory advises that she abstain from taking Communion because of her serious fornication. Remanded to Thursday.

From Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, Vol. 1: 1542-1544.

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Reformation on the Run

Lacking political protection or religious freedom, French Reformed thinkers forged a unique expression of faith.

Martin I. Klauber

Because Roman Catholicism dominated the French religious landscape in the sixteenth century, it is easy to forget that some of the most prominent theologians of the Reformed movement were French. Persecuted at home, many of these theologians fled to Switzerland, Germany, or the Netherlands, but they wrote with their besieged French brethren in mind.

Stirrings of reform

French Reformed thinking can be traced back to Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (d. 1536), who, in his 1512 commentary on the Pauline epistles, argued for justification by faith. Lefèvre distinguished between a man-centered form of righteousness based on works and a God-centered form based on God's grace through Christ. He also anticipated the foundational doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, arguing that the Bible is sufficient in matters related to salvation.

Lefèvre emphasized the literal sense of Scripture over the medieval fourfold approach, which emphasized the allegorical interpretation. Also, like Martin Luther, he made great use of the Psalms as prophecies of the ministry and work of Christ. Lefèvre wrote in the preface to his Quincuplex Psalterium, "I have tried to write a short exposition of the Psalms with the assistance of Christ, who is the key to the understanding of David. He is the one about whom David spoke."

In spite of all these ideas that anticipated and predated the Reformation, most scholars do not consider Lefèvre a Protestant. He did, however, set the stage for others.

Some of Lefèvre's students, such as Bishop Briçonnet of Meaux, stayed loyal to the Roman Catholic Church and tried to reform it from within. Briçonnet encouraged everyone in his diocese to read the Scriptures and even financed a new French translation of the Greek Bible. These actions pitted Briçonnet against the Sorbonne, a guardian of Catholic orthodoxy, but King Francis I shielded the bishop from harsh punishments. Ultimately the bishop proved to be more a humanist than a reformer.

Many of Lefèvre's students, however, broke with the Catholic Church and had to flee the country. Lefèvre left after the Sorbonne and the Parlement of Paris broke up Briçonnet's reform-minded circle in 1525. Melchior Wolmar, a professor of Greek at Bourges who taught John Calvin, fled to Germany. The famous poet Clement Marot, who authored the French Psalter, spent time in Navarre. Other refugees included Pierre Viret and Theodore Beza, who fled to Lausanne, and Guillaume Farel and Calvin, who settled in Geneva.

From Calvin to Calvinism

The impact of Calvin's thought and example among the Huguenots cannot be overemphasized. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was translated into French by 1541 and became the standard for French Protestant thought, which did not follow the Lutheran but the Calvinist ideal. The French Reformed Church also followed Calvin's lead in its organizational pattern, instituting the offices of pastor,

elder, teacher, and deacon as Calvin set forth in his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541). The Academy of Geneva, founded by Calvin, served as a training ground for French pastors.

Scholars view Beza as a transitional figure between the era of Calvin and that of Calvinism. He continued Calvin's ministry in Geneva and wrote extensively on a number of topics, notably the doctrine of predestination. His treatise on the subject, *The Sum of All Christianity* (1555), defended Calvin against the attacks of Jerome Bolsec (1524-1574), a former Carmelite monk who accused Calvin of making God the author of sin. Beza argued for a strict "double predestination," whereby God decrees some to be destined for heaven and the rest of humanity to damnation.

Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534-1591), another second-generation Reformed theologian, studied with Calvin in Geneva, then took Calvin's ideas in a more formal direction. His scholastic method, refined while he taught at the Reformed Academy, became a central principle for future Reformed theologians throughout Europe.

Chandieu employed syllogistic reasoning to articulate a Protestant response to sophisticated Roman Catholic attacks on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. He offered this argument for the sufficiency of the Bible: "Whatever is the Word of God, divinely inspired and written by the prophets, apostles, and evangelists by the breath of God's Spirit, contains all the doctrines necessary for Christian faith. But Holy Scripture is the word of God and is divinely inspired. Therefore, Holy Scripture contains all the doctrines necessary for the Christian faith."

We believe

Foundational Huguenot beliefs are spelled out most directly in the French Confession of Faith (1559), which was drawn up at a synod of the French Reformed churches in Paris during a lull in the persecution. It was based largely on a Genevan draft, probably revised by Chandieu, and included a prefatory plea to the French King Francis II to stop the oppression of the Huguenots.

The confession contains a clear expression of the doctrine of justification by faith and the completed work of Christ on the cross to blot out all of our sins. It does not include a developed doctrine of double predestination, though it does state that God calls some to salvation and leaves the rest in condemnation: "We believe that from this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calls those whom he has chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy; leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice."

The confession specifically rejects such Roman Catholic practices as prayers to the saints, calling "all imaginations of men concerning the intercession of dead saints ... an abuse and a device of Satan to lead men from the right way of worship." It also condemns "monastic vows, pilgrimages, the prohibition of marriage and of eating meat, the ceremonial observance of days, auricular confession, indulgences, and all such things by which [Catholics] hope to merit forgiveness and salvation."

Huguenots recognized only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. While Catholics believed that sacraments play a role in salvation, for Huguenots they were "outward signs through which God operates by his Spirit, so that he may not signify any thing to us in vain."

Though Huguenots regarded baptism as a sign of God's inward work, they encouraged infant baptism: "Nevertheless, although it is a sacrament of faith and penitence, yet as God receives little children into the Church with their fathers, we say, upon the authority of Jesus Christ, that the children of believing parents should be baptized."

Regarding rebaptism of Catholic converts, the Huguenot confession admits an uneasy relationship with

Rome: "Nevertheless, as some trace of the Church is left in the papacy, and the virtue and substance of baptism remain, and as the efficacy of baptism does not depend upon the person who administers it, we confess that those baptized in it do not need a second baptism. But, on account of its corruptions, we cannot present children to be baptized in it without incurring pollution."

In its descriptions of the Lord's Supper, the confession veers more sharply from Rome, though it stops short of stripping the elements of all supernatural significance. It states, "Thus we hold ... that the bread and wine given to us in the sacrament serve to our spiritual nourishment, inasmuch as they show, as to our sight, that the body of Christ is our meat, and his blood our drink. And we reject the Enthusiasts and Sacramentarians who will not receive such signs and marks, although our Savior said: 'This is my body, and this cup is my blood.'"

The last two articles of the confession deal with the relationship between church and state. They affirm the right of the magistrate to wield the power of the sword to suppress criminal acts and to protect God's commands, and they specifically condemn motions to overthrow divinely appointed kings, "even if they are unbelievers." As persecution increased, though, Huguenot thinkers explored the limits of godly obedience and the legitimacy of armed resistance.

Political theology

Calvin was reluctant to support violent insurrection because of Paul's clear command in Romans 13 to obey governmental authorities. However, the German Lutherans of the Schmalkaldic League had proposed a way out of the Romans 13 dilemma. If one could show that a tyrannical king had violated the rights of local magistrates to govern, then local government officials would have the right to protect their subjects against the monarch.

After the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, French Reformed theologians allowed more and more room for armed resistance against the crown. Francis Hotman penned the ***Franco Gallia***, in which he argued that the influx of the Roman ideas had led to the absolutist tendencies of the monarchy. Based on ancient Gallic law, the monarchy should be constitutional, and any violation of the rights of the French people could result in rebellion.

The ***Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos***, by Philippe du Plessis Mornay, pointed to the abrogation of the compact between the king and the people, with the result that the people were free to resist their tyrannical ruler.

Beza developed the theological support for resistance against tyranny in his monumental treatise ***Du droit des magistrats*** (1573). He also argued, in ***The Grounds and Principles of Christian Religion*** (1591), "As often as the Magistrate commands anything that is repugnant either to the worship which we owe unto God, or to the love which we owe unto our neighbor, we cannot yield obedience thereunto with a safe conscience. For as often as the commandment of God and men are directly opposed one against another, this rule is to be perpetually observed; that it is better to obey God than men."

Political quandaries lost some immediacy in 1598 when King Henri IV issued the Edict of Nantes, giving Huguenots legal recognition. Soon afterward Reformed thinkers were faced with a new challenge, as one of Beza's students, Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), questioned such fundamental Calvinist doctrines as predestination. But while the locus of debate shifted, the situation was hardly unique. Reformed theologians had been fighting for their ideals, as well as their lives, from the beginning.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Pleading the Cause of Christ

In the Prefatory Address to his Institutes, John Calvin defends both his doctrine and its battered believers.

John Calvin

To his most Christian Majesty, the most mighty and illustrious Monarch, Francis, King of the French, his Sovereign;

John Calvin prays Peace and Salvation in Christ.

Sire,—When I first engaged in this work, nothing was farther from my thoughts than to write what should afterwards be presented to your Majesty. My intention was only to furnish a kind of rudiments, by which those who feel some interest in religion might be trained to true godliness. And I toiled at the task chiefly for the sake of my countrymen the French, multitudes of whom I perceived to be hungering and thirsting after Christ, while very few seemed to have been duly imbued with even a slender knowledge of him. That this was the object which I had in view is apparent from the work itself, which is written in a simple and elementary form adapted for instruction.

But when I perceived that the fury of certain bad men had risen to such a height in your realm, that there was no place in it for sound doctrine, I thought it might be of service if I were in the same work both to give instruction to my countrymen, and also lay before your Majesty a Confession, from which you may learn what the doctrine is that so inflames the rage of those madmen who are this day, with fire and sword, troubling your kingdom. For I fear not to declare, that what I have here given may be regarded as a summary of the very doctrine which, they vociferate, ought to be punished with confiscation, exile, imprisonment, and flames, as well as exterminated by land and sea. ...

Let it not be imagined that I am here framing my own private defense, with the view of obtaining a safe return my native land. Though I cherish towards it the feelings which become me as a man, still, as matters now are, I can be absent from it without regret. The cause which I plead is the common cause of all the godly and therefore the very cause of Christ—a cause which, throughout your realm, now lies, as it were, in despair, torn and trampled upon in all kinds of ways, and that more through the tyranny of certain Pharisees than any sanction from yourself. But it matters not to inquire how the thing is done; the fact that it is done cannot be denied. For so far have the wicked prevailed, that the truth of Christ, if not utterly routed and dispersed, lurks as if it were ignobly buried; while the poor Church, either wasted by cruel slaughter or driven into exile, or intimidated and terror-struck, scarcely ventures to breathe. Still her enemies press on with their wonted rage and fury over the ruins which they have made, strenuously assaulting the wall, which is already giving way. Meanwhile, no man comes forth to offer his protection against such furies. ...

Your duty, most serene Prince, is, not to shut either your ears or mind against a cause involving such mighty interests as these: how the glory of God is to be maintained on the earth inviolate, how the truth of God is to preserve its dignity, how the kingdom of Christ is to continue amongst us compact and secure. The cause is worthy of your ear, worthy of your investigation, worthy of your throne.

The characteristic of a true sovereign is, to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God. He who does not make his reign subservient to the divine glory, acts the part not of a

king, but a robber. He, moreover, deceives himself who anticipates long prosperity to any kingdom which is not ruled by the sceptre of God, that is, by his divine word. For the heavenly oracle is infallible which has declared, that "where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

Let not a contemptuous idea of our insignificance dissuade you from the investigation of this cause. We, indeed, are perfectly conscious how poor and abject we are: in the presence of God we are miserable sinners, and in the sight of men most despised ... so that before God there remains nothing of which we can glory save only his mercy, by which, without any merit of our own, we are admitted to the hope of eternal salvation: and before men not even this much remains, since we can glory only in our infirmity, a thing which, in the estimation of men, it is the greatest ignominy even tacitly to confess. But our doctrine must stand sublime above all the glory of the world, and invincible by all its power, because it is not ours, but that of the living God and his Anointed, whom the Father has appointed King.

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The French Wars of Religion: Christian History Timeline

CH Timeline

1555 Peace of Augsburg in Germany allows rulers to choose religion for their region

1555 First Protestant Church in Paris organized in a home

1556 Philip II named king of Spain

1558 Elizabeth I becomes queen of England

1559 First national synod of Reformed Churches of France

1559 John Calvin made a citizen of Geneva

1560 Protestant Conspiracy of Amboise to kidnap king of France fails

1561 Anti-Protestant edict begins to drive refugees from France

1562-1563 First War

1562 Forces of Duke of Guise massacre Protestants at Vassy

1563 Treaty of Amboise ends First War

1563 Council of Trent closes

1564 Calvin dies

1567-1568 Second War

1568-1570 Third War

1568 Treaty of Longjumeau ends Second War

1569 Peace of St. Germain ends Third War

1572-1573 Fourth War

1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre

1574 Truce ends Fourth War

1574 Charles IX (right) dies; Henri III (left) becomes king of France

1576 Fifth War

1576 Pro-Protestant Peace of Monsieur signed

1576 Militant Catholic League forms

1577 Sixth War

1577 Sixth War ended by slightly restrictive Peace of Bergerac

1580 Seventh War

1580 Treaty of Nerac and Peace of Fleix end Seventh War

1584 Duke of Anjou dies; Henri of Navarre becomes heir to French throne

1588 Henri III forced to surrender to Guises and Catholic League

1588 English navy defeats Spanish Armada

1589 Henri III stabbed, names Henri of Navarre his successor

1589 Catherine de Médicis dies

1593 Henri IV converts to Catholicism

1598 Edict of Nantes returns civil and religious freedom to Protestants

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 71: The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion

Slaughter, Mayhem, & Providence

How one of France's greatest poets made sense of the Huguenot tragedies.

Alan D. Savage

Traveling through Amboise on their way to Paris in 1560, Jean d'Aubigné and his 8-year-old son, Agrippa, came upon a horrible spectacle: the hanging bodies of decapitated Protestant conspirators who had attempted to steal the young King Francis II away from the Catholic dukes of Guise. The father made his son swear to defend the faith for which the men had died, and Agrippa d'Aubigné did indeed spend his life fighting for what became known as *La Cause*.

D'Aubigné waged his battle for the Huguenot faith on two fronts: the battlefield and paper. He first took up arms at age 12, when he climbed out of his bedroom window and ran off to join the Protestant troops defending the besieged city of Orléans. He eventually became a key player in the Wars of Religion that devastated France in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Starting in 1573, he served as equerry, adviser, and friend to Henri of Navarre (the future Henri IV) until the latter finally rejected the Reformed faith in 1593. Eventually exiled from France, d'Aubigné spent the last decade of his life in Geneva, where he served on the city's war council.

While brave and forceful as a military man, d'Aubigné is mainly known because of his second weapon, his pen. With the exception of his first collection of poems, *Printemps* (Springtime), which he later rejected because it deals with worldly rather than divine love, d'Aubigné's works all revolve around his faith and the *parti protestant*.

Although d'Aubigné has never ranked as highly as the sixteenth-century literary giants François Rabelais, Pierre de Ronsard, and Michel de Montaigne, he is nonetheless considered one of France's greatest authors, due almost solely to his work *Les Tragiques*. He began the work in the trenches of Casteljaloux in 1577 and, although he had probably finished most of it by 1583, he continued to rework it until he finally decided to publish it—anonymously, clandestinely, and at his own expense—in 1616.

Composed of approximately 10,000 verses, the poem received a cold reception when it appeared because of both its content and style. It was not until two centuries later that the famous literary critic Sainte-Beuve called attention to the greatness of *Les Tragiques*, and twentieth-century literary critics, for whom the work is "the epic of Huguenot faith," have compared it to the *Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*.

Poetic polemic

Les Tragiques (the title refers to the extraordinarily tragic events of the times) is a poetic, and highly polemic, account of the Wars of Religion. It depicts the horrors of the conflicts that ravaged France—with biting satire reserved for those considered responsible, mainly the king, princes, and the Roman Catholic Church—in a way that highlights God's control over history and emphasizes the eventual, sure triumph of the true (Protestant) church.

The epic is divided into seven books. The first, *Misères*, recounts, as the title suggests, the pain resulting from the civil strife, with chilling details of cruel deaths. The second book, *Les Princes*, lays

the blame for France's problems squarely on the shoulders of those in charge and the Catholic church they upheld. Henri III appears as the "woman King or Queen man," and Catherine de Médicis is none other than Jezebel.

Book three, *La Chambre Dorée* (Parlement of Paris), indicts the courts for their mishandling of justice. *Les Feux* (Fires) comes next, largely influenced by Jean Crespin's *L'Acte des Martyrs*, with vivid portrayals of those burned at the stake for their faith.

The fifth book, *Les Fers* (Arms), recounts the Huguenots' armed struggle for recognition, and the sixth, *Vengeances*, focuses on God's past and present punishments for those opposed to the "true church." *Jugement*, the last book, moves the reader into the end times, when all wrongs will be righted in God's newly established kingdom.

As the titles indicate, the poem progresses from a horizontal level (*Misères, Princes, Chambre Dorée, Feux, Fers*) to a vertical level (*Vengeances, Jugement*). This observation is only partly valid, however, for although the format gives a certain chronological structure to the work—moving from the present to the future, and from a human perspective to a divine perspective—the presence of God throughout the work makes the realities of Judgement already active in the present.

D'Aubigné articulates this viewpoint in the preface, where he claims that "*Dieu-même en a donné l'argument*" ("God himself has told the story"). In other words, the author is merely a scribe, a prophet explaining how God sees things from his eternal perspective. Thus, for example, in the passage in *Fers* where Admiral Coligny dies, the reader sees Coligny himself in heaven watching over the whole scene. God's control of history and his work on behalf of the Huguenots despite apparent failure are never questioned by d'Aubigné.

The most often cited passage from *Les Tragiques* comes from the first book, in which d'Aubigné gives a haunting depiction of war-torn France (only the first four lines are given in French; the translation goes on to complete the passage):

*Je veux peindre la France une mère affligée,
Qui est, entre ses bras, de deux enfants chargée.
Le plus fort, orgueilleux, empoigne les deux bouts
Des tetins nourriciers; puis à force de coups ...*

I see France as a wounded mother
Holding in her lap her two children.
The strongest one, proud, grabs both ends
Of her nourishing breasts; then, with blows of
Nails, fists, and feet, he takes the share
That nature gave to his twin.
This stubborn thief, this damned Esau
Ruins the sweet milk meant to nourish the two,
So much so that, in order to take his brother's life,
He ends up despising his own, no longer desiring it.
But his Jacob, hungry from having fasted,
Having long held his pain in his heart,
In the end defends himself, and his righteous anger
Renders to the other a battle whose field is the mother.

The personification of France as a mother reveals the deep tenderness that Frenchmen, both Protestant and Catholic, felt for their country. The outbreak of hostilities was certainly not a surprise—tensions between the *parti catholique* and *parti protestant* had grown steadily since early in the sixteenth century—but no one was prepared for the devastation of civil war. (Before d'Aubigné wrote his piece,

Catholic poet Ronsard had written *Discours Sur Les Misères de ce temps*, in which he also laments what was happening to the country, blaming, of course, the Protestants.)

In this passage d'Aubigné uses violent vocabulary and shocking images to accomplish his unabashedly partisan goal of stirring up the emotions of his coreligionists in order to incite them to keep fighting for ***La Cause***.

The violence he portrays illustrates what one well-known sixteenth-century scholar, Jean Céard, calls "***le monde à l'envers***" ("the world upside down"). The violence and pain of the religious struggles left most everyone feeling that the world had gone topsy-turvy, that the natural had given way to the unnatural. The feuding twins and the mother ravaged by her own children exemplify this phenomenon: war between different countries could be understood, but not matricide, not fratricide.

Nonetheless, this passage is not devoid of God's presence and the conviction of eventual triumph for the Huguenots, for here d'Aubigné depicts the Catholics as Esau and his own ***parti*** as Jacob. Although the French Protestants, in their typological reading of the Old Testament, most often compared themselves to the Israelites coming out of Egypt, their reading of the story of Esau and Jacob was also highly important, because Jacob represented God's mysterious election—of them, the Huguenots.

Speaking of Jacob's "righteous anger," d'Aubigné does not miss the chance to justify the rebellion of the Huguenots. The Protestants heeded Calvin's call to endure persecution patiently until the tenets of the first edict of religious freedom, the ***édit de janvier***, were violated by the Catholics at the massacre of Vassy, which led to the first religious war.

More important, when d'Aubigné depicts the Huguenots as Jacob, he immediately changes the story from one seen on a purely human level to one being told within the overall narrative of God's kingdom and his work on behalf of the elect.

No matter how horrid and difficult their sufferings, the Huguenots were sure of one thing: as Jacob, they were God's chosen, while the Catholics were rejected. They firmly believed that, although God might be chastening them, he loved them and was already establishing his kingdom in the manner described in ***Les Tragiques***.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Huguenots and the Wars of Religion: The Gallery - The Inner Circle

Huguenot intrigues swirled around a handful of key figures.

Emily Alger; Matt Donnelly

Catherine de Médicis

1519-1589

"Madame la Serpente"

In 1575 a heavily slanted piece of propaganda called the "Marvellous discourse on the life, actions and misconduct of Catherine de Médicis, queen mother" disparaged France's acting regent as "a woman, a foreigner, and hated by everyone." The first two charges were undeniably true, and she had double-crossed enough people to make the third nearly true as well.

Catherine became queen of France by family connections and chance. A member of the ruling Médicis family of Florence, she was betrothed at age 12 to the prince who would later become France's King Henri II. France sought the match not because Catherine had money or beauty (she was described as being small and thin, having indelicate features and bulging eyes, a Médicis trait), but because of her distant relation to Pope Clement VII.

She married in 1533, at age 14, then failed to bear children for the next 10 years. The entire court wished Henri to divorce her, but he chose instead to take a mistress, Diane of Poitiers. Upset by the affair but powerless to do anything about it, Catherine turned to astrologers and magicians in a frantic quest to bear a child. In 1544 she finally delivered a future king, Francis. She eventually bore seven other children, two of whom would also rule France in turn. Still, Henri rejected her.

When she could not win Henri's love, Catherine befriended Marguerite of Navarre, Henri's aunt. Marguerite was a great friend of John Calvin and supported the Protestants with money and position. According to Protestant writers, Marguerite persuaded Catherine to begin reading her Bible. An archbishop was so horrified that he confiscated the Bible, likening Catherine's behavior to eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge.

Catherine's true religious views are unknown. Raised a Catholic, at times she seemed to sympathize with the Huguenots, but it is unclear whether she favored their doctrine or simply wished to keep peace in her kingdom. Her political aspirations certainly outweighed her piety. A Catholic official, Nuncio Frangipani, once wrote, "This queen no more believes in God than does any member of her suite."

Pretence or not, her sympathy for the Huguenots abruptly ceased while her son Charles IX was king. During his reign, the Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny became good friends with Charles and gained influence over him. Fearing for her position, Catherine conspired against the Huguenots with Henri, duke of Guise, the Catholic leader. After convincing a reluctant Charles to go along with her plans, she arranged to have the French Protestants—including her erstwhile friend Coligny—massacred while they were in Paris to attend her daughter Marguerite's wedding.

In the long view, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre backfired, because instead of eradicating the Huguenot faction, it plunged France into a series of bloody conflicts that would destroy the Valois-Médicis line. Catherine repeatedly switched confessional loyalties and attempted to forge ties with both Protestant

and Catholic countries, but no one trusted her (the Spanish called her "Madame la Serpente"). Both sides reviled her, producing massive quantities of libelous propaganda. Catherine amused herself by reading the articles and correcting them.

At age 70, Catherine died an embittered woman. Supposedly her last words were, "Blood! Blood! There is a river of blood! ... The devils are after me! They are dragging me down to hell!"

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Gaspard de Coligny

1519-1572

A friend betrayed

Those who knew Gaspard de Coligny said he was a simple man who frequently chewed on toothpicks. Born into the powerful Montmorency family in 1519, he entered the military and distinguished himself in battle against the Protestants, earning the title of admiral in 1552. King Henri II (Catherine's husband) appreciated Coligny, and the two became close friends and hunting companions.

Coligny converted to Protestantism in the 1550s through a study of the Bible and the works of John Calvin and Martin Luther, but he didn't publicly declare his support for the Reformation until after Henri II died, in a jousting accident, in 1559. As a tireless crusader for religious freedom in France, Coligny became a hero and a leader of the Huguenots.

After the king's death, Catherine's young sons began to assume the throne in succession, and she became the real power in the land. In the early 1560s, as de facto ruler of France, she enthusiastically supported Coligny's plans for Huguenot journeys to the New World to found Protestant colonies there. She also initially supported Coligny's attempts to broker a peace between Catholics and Protestants.

But fearing that Coligny's friendship with her son King Charles IX (1560-1574) was undermining her influence, and because Coligny was agitating for France to go to war with Spain over Holland, she betrayed Coligny. On August 22, 1572, Coligny, head of the Huguenot armies, barely survived a bullet fired by an assassin, who was almost certainly hired by Catherine and members of the Guise family.

After the attempt on Coligny's life, Huguenot leaders recommended that he leave Paris immediately, but he refused. He trusted the young king, who frequently referred to Coligny as "my father." Little did he know that Catherine was at that hour successful in convincing her son that Coligny was plotting to overthrow the government. Charles is reported to have said to her, "Well, then kill them all, that no man be left to reproach me." Thus the fate of the Huguenots was sealed.

On the night of August 24, 1572, the palace bell rang, which was Catherine's signal for the slaughter of Huguenots to begin. Coligny was one of the first to die.

A group of assassins broke into his home, and Besme, a German mercenary, stabbed Coligny through the stomach with a sword, leaving him for dead. The leader of the assassins, Henri of Guise, called out, "Besme! is it done?" In response, Coligny was thrown out the window, where he died at Guise's feet.

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Henri of Navarre

1553-1610

Strong leader, flexible faith

As the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre raged outside the Louvre, young Henri of Navarre stood before the enraged King Charles IX, who shouted, "*La mort ou la Messe*"—death or conversion to Catholicism. Henri chose the latter.

Henri might have been expected to show more resolve. His mother, Jeanne d'Albrêt, had passionately supported the Protestant cause. Several victims of the massacre had been Henri's wedding guests days earlier. And conversion was only a partial solution—Henri saved his life, but he would spend the next three years as a prisoner of royal counselors.

Henri did not seem to mind. A few weeks after his conversion, he played tennis with the Duke of Guise, a driving force behind the massacre.

Henri's marriage to the king's sister Marguerite—a symbolic union of Protestantism and Catholicism—had been intended to foster peace during the devastating Wars of Religion. Instead, it became the unhappy context of the infamous massacre and a public demonstration of Henri's seemingly pliable convictions.

"Those who follow their conscience are of my religion," Henri said. Of course, he also said, "Religion is not changed as easily as a shirt."

When Henri finally decided to escape his royal captivity, his skills as a hunter proved useful. One night he disappeared into a thick forest on horseback. He eventually made it all the way to his small southern border state of Navarre, where he quickly converted back to Protestantism.

He left behind a loveless arranged marriage, strained by scandal as well as different temperaments and faiths. Both he and Marguerite were involved in numerous infidelities, though they had little passion for each other and never produced an heir. Shortly after the union, "We never slept nor spoke with each other any more," Marguerite reported. The marriage was later annulled.

In normal circumstances, Henri never would have become king. His cousin Charles IX had two healthy brothers, Henri and Hercule (called François), whose claim was stronger than his. Yet upon seeing Henri as a boy, Catherine's court prophet Nostradamus had inexplicably predicted that he would reign over all of France.

In 1584 François died. Henri III, who had become king when Charles died 10 years earlier, declared Henri of Navarre the heir presumptive. French Catholics, 90 percent of the country's population, reacted with outrage and disbelief. How could the Church tolerate a Protestant king, when the job would require him to act as the national protector of Catholicism and to eradicate heresy? Pope Sixtus V excommunicated the heretic, and after the assassination of Henri III in 1589, the Catholic League supported rivals to the throne.

The wars that followed demonstrated that Henri of Navarre, now Henri IV, was made of sterner stuff than his effeminate predecessor, who at his coronation had shrieked that the crown was hurting his head. Henri IV not only commanded armies, but he fought alongside them in hundreds of battles and sieges, leading charges and suffering numerous wounds along the way.

Henri's military prowess, though, took him only so far. Out of money as his army laid siege to Paris in 1593, he faced a crisis. While he might eventually capture the city, he doubted that any military victory would enable him to capture the hearts of the overwhelmingly Catholic French. Only conversion would bring him the crown.

Some of Henri's advisers argued that abjuring Protestantism would betray his people and all they had suffered. But the staunchly Protestant Duke of Sully spoke for many war-weary Huguenots when he

reportedly counseled, "Paris is well worth a Mass."

Although Henri's final conversion disappointed some and brought accusations of hypocrisy from others, it ended the Wars of Religion and made national restoration possible. Moderate elements of society applauded, and one periodical declared, "There is no peace so unjust that it is not worth more than the most just war."

In spite of his confessional wavering, Henri took his beliefs seriously. He astonished his Catholic instructors with his theological knowledge, then unnerved them by tearfully asserting that they must make certain of his salvation, for he was trusting them with his immortal soul. However, he disparaged some Catholic doctrines as "rubbish which he was quite sure that the majority of them did not believe."

Politically, Henri proved to be an astute leader. In one of his first acts as king, he declared general amnesty. He let go of personal grudges, too. He took his worst enemy, the Duke of Mayenne, on such a brisk walk that the rotund nobleman was soon huffing and sweating. Henri finally halted and embraced him, saying, "This is all the vengeance you will ever suffer from me!"

Out of concern for the peasantry, he forbade nobles from riding over crops when hunting. He spoke of his desire that there be a chicken in every pot. He rebuked troops who pillaged the poor by declaring, "To rob my people is to rob me."

Henri was considerably less keen in his personal life, especially around women. For example, he adored hunting but rarely bathed afterward. On her wedding night, his second wife, Marie de Médicis, drenched herself in perfume, but she was still overpowered by his odor. Concurrent mistress Henriette D'Entragues told him he smelled like carrion.

Henri introduced these two women upon Marie's arrival in Paris, saying, "She has been my mistress—now she is going to be your most biddable and obedient servant." Henriette had to be physically forced to curtsy to Marie, whom she called Henri's "fat Florentine banker" (he had married Marie in exchange for the cancellation of a large debt France owed her family). Marie bore him seven children, beginning with Louis XIII, an unquestioning Catholic who later promoted Cardinal Richelieu.

One act stands out in this mixed legacy. In 1598 Henri signed the Edict of Nantes, which gave Protestants legal recognition and ended the Wars of Religion. The price of this peace was allowing the Huguenots to exist as a separate state within France's borders.

Though hailed today as a landmark act of toleration, the compromise was seen by some Catholics as a betrayal of Henri's coronation promise to defend the faith. In 1610 he, like Henri III before him, was assassinated by a fanatical Catholic.

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Cardinal Richelieu

1585-1642

Servant of the state

A brother's abrupt decision to become a monk rather than a bishop put the benefice that supported Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu's family in jeopardy. Although Richelieu was then a promising student at France's leading military academy, his mother informed him that he must leave and begin theological studies.

Richelieu accepted without protest, cloistered himself with the texts of his new discipline, and never

afterward expressed any hint of resentment. His ambitions could be as readily assuaged in the politically powerful Catholic Church of the seventeenth century as in the military.

Richelieu quickly won support from both Protestants and Catholics in his bishopric through tax reduction. He told Huguenots wary after long years of strife, "I know that there are some of this company who are not one with us in Faith, but I hope they shall be one with us in love."

While pragmatic and tolerant, he was also immensely self-confident; during this time he wrote an essay titled "Who Will Be My Equal?" Hubris was made prophecy by his rapid rise to power, which saw him appointed both cardinal and Louis XIII's chief minister before his fortieth birthday.

His guiding principle for governing was *raison d'état* (reason of state), which gave the state's welfare priority over other ethical concerns. "A Christian," he wrote, "cannot too soon forgive an injury, but a ruler cannot too soon punish it when it is a crime against the state."

Because of his conviction that enemies of his policies—and his person—were among the enemies of France, both were punished ruthlessly. "Give me six lines written by the most honorable of men, and I will find an excuse in them to hang him," he is reliably quoted in the play *Mirame*.

Richelieu believed France's greatest challenge was its fragmentation. Accordingly, the problem with the Huguenots was not their faith, but their status as "a state within a state." His campaign against the symbolic Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle was carried out with steely determination, finally wringing surrender from the siege's survivors after 13 months. Yet after his victory, Richelieu stunned Huguenots and outraged Catholics with his leniency. Soon Huguenot industry was reintegrated in the economy of a more unified France.

Richelieu next challenged the autonomy of the nobility by ordering the demolition of their fortifications. To help drive home the new principle of centralized authority, he also banned dueling and promptly executed the first nobleman who defied him. "It is a question of breaking the neck of duels or of your Majesty's edicts," he told the king.

The cardinal's campaign to solidify France sometimes took surprising turns. At one point he paid the Protestant king of Sweden to turn the tide against the Catholic Hapsburgs during the Thirty Years War—a counter-intuitive strategy that succeeded in undermining his country's rivals. He has since been both hailed as a founder of modern France and blamed for the French Revolution.

Shortly after Richelieu's death, in 1642, Pope Urban VIII evaluated his career by saying, "If there is a God, he will have much to answer for. If not, he has done very well."

—*Reagan White*

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 71: The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion

Forgotten Reformer

As obscure now as his tiny native village, Pierre Viret once captured the hearts of the Huguenots.

Robert D. Linder

No tourist in Geneva can miss the impressive Reformation Monument with its four towering figures: John Calvin, Guillaume Farel, Theodore Beza, and John Knox. Some visitors might even notice a series of reliefs on the statue's base, which depict various scenes from the Genevan Reformation. Yet only a sharp-eyed observer is likely to spot in one of the reliefs a spare man with a long beard preaching to a crowd of intent listeners: Pierre Viret, now virtually forgotten among the major reformers.

A changed man

Viret was born in the obscure village of Orbe, near Lausanne, in 1511. One of three sons of a poor tailor, Viret was a precocious child who benefited from a new village school where several of the teachers were trained humanists and suspected Lutherans. He developed an interest in the classics and theology which, in 1528, led him to study for the priesthood. He entered the Collège de Montaigu at the University of Paris at about the time Calvin was leaving and Ignatius Loyola was enrolling.

Viret left Paris two years later a changed man. The new Protestant ideas that were flourishing at the great university led to Viret's personal commitment to Christ.

Returning to Orbe, he found the village divided into Protestant and Catholic factions. Then Farel, the traveling evangelist largely responsible for this division, challenged young Viret to become a minister of the Gospel and to preach the Reformation in his native village. Viret resisted, then yielded to what the older man seemed to be certain was the will of God for Viret's life.

Viret possessed outstanding gifts as a Gospel orator. He won Orbe over to the Reformation. He was then asked to preach in Payerne, where he was badly wounded when a band of Catholics attempted to kill him, and at Neuchâtel before linking up again with Farel in Geneva in 1534.

Viret and Farel preached salvation and reform in Geneva for the next two years. The city was in an uproar: its citizens had decided to cast off the rule of the Catholic Duke of Savoy, but they had not yet embraced Protestantism. Viret celebrated the first Genevan baptism according to evangelical forms, took part with Farel in the debate that convinced the Council of Geneva to renounce Catholicism, and, in 1536, silently witnessed Farel accost Calvin and inform him of God's will for his life.

Catholic radicals tried again to silence Viret's voice, this time by poisoning his spinach soup. Viret suffered from digestive problems for the rest of his life, but he would not be intimidated.

Leading Lausanne

With the Protestant faith now firmly planted and Calvin ensconced alongside Farel, Viret left Geneva to help consolidate the Reformation in Lausanne, the chief city of his native Pays de Vaud. His ministry flourished in Lausanne as the city became overwhelmingly Reformed under his leadership. He also founded, supervised, and taught at an academy to train Protestant leaders and established social services

to care for the city's unfortunate.

Viret lived in constant tension with the authorities in Berne, however, who wanted to keep a tight political rein on Lausanne. Following a confrontation at Easter 1559, the Bernese exiled Viret.

Soon thereafter, Viret joined his old friend Calvin in Geneva, bringing with him many of the Lausanne ministers, all but one of the faculty of the Academy of Lausanne, and nearly 1,000 of his parishioners. Calvin's city became the undisputed center of the Reformed world.

The Genevans loved Viret. They immediately elected him a minister of the Geneva Church and assigned him a salary of 800 florins plus 12 strikes of corn and two casks of wine a year. The Council also provided him a commodious house, which Calvin noted was bigger and better furnished than his own.

Despite his important assignment and generous treatment, Viret grew restless. Geneva was now almost completely Protestant and firmly under Calvin's theological control. News from France, where Protestants suffered harsh persecution and lacked pastoral guidance, turned his mind to a new challenge.

Harvest fields of France

In 1561 Viret requested leave from the Geneva Council and Company of Pastors to visit the land of the Huguenots. The official reason was that his ailing health demanded warmer climes. However, once in southern France, he quickly recovered sufficient strength to engage in continuous rounds of impassioned preaching.

He traveled first to Lyon, and then on to Nîmes, where he regularly preached to crowds numbering as many as 8,000—almost the entire population. Riots followed many of his sermons, despite Viret's pleas for peace. The disorders eventually subsided, and within a few months Nîmes was solidly Protestant.

In the meantime, invitations poured in from churches in Paris, Orléans, Avignon, Montauban, and Montpellier. The leaders of Nîmes begged him to remain with them. Finally, after much prayer, Viret moved to Montpellier, where he saw the conversion of nearly the entire faculty of the city's famous medical college. Only the outbreak of the first War of Religion interrupted his ministry. Though there was fighting in the Montpellier area, Viret's personal intercession apparently kept bloodshed to a minimum.

He then returned to Lyon, the major city of southeastern France, to begin a three-year ministry. Despite ill health, civil war, and a violent outbreak of the plague, Viret was able to establish his moral authority in the city. He preached daily to large crowds, counseled the soldiers of the Protestant army, and wrote at least 12 books while revising and reprinting several more, including his monumental ***Instruction chrestienne***. He also ministered to victims of the plague and carried on a lively correspondence with other leaders of the Protestant Reformation.

Royal authority was re-established in Lyon in July, 1563, and with it Roman Catholic worship. In the months that followed, Viret participated in a pamphlet war with the returned Catholic leader and with various radicals and dissidents in the city. This multi-sided verbal warfare continued for nearly two years until local Catholic clergy obtained a royal order for Viret's expulsion from the kingdom of France. The notice giving him eight days to leave the country was delivered on August 27, 1565.

Viret fled to Béarn in Navarre, a semi-autonomous kingdom in what is now southwestern France. He was befriended there by Jeanne d'Albrêt, the staunchly Protestant Queen of Navarre and mother of the future Henry IV of France. She made Viret one of her chief advisers and superintendent of the academy she had established at Ortez.

Catholic forces captured Viret and 11 other Reformed ministers in a surprise attack during the third religious war (1568-1570). The Catholic commander ordered the execution of 7 of the 12 but spared Viret largely because of the positive reputation he enjoyed even among his ecclesiastical enemies. A few weeks later, he was rescued by counter-attacking Protestant forces and returned to his intense and successful ministry.

Secrets of Viret's success

How could Viret, a foreigner, become the most successful and sought-after Protestant preacher in sixteenth-century France?

First, his good reputation had preceded him. Many people had heard stories of the physical and verbal attacks he had suffered as an evangelist, but they sensed no malice about him. To the contrary, tales of his gentle spirit and kindly nature were common. He was also known as an eloquent preacher and as the author of more than 50 popular books.

Second, Viret's personality and pastoral heart endeared him to the Huguenots. Like his listeners, he knew sorrow: his first wife, two daughters, and a son died in the plagues that visited Lausanne, and he also lost two daughters and, eventually, his second wife to the plague during his years in France.

His letters to his friend Calvin reveal how these losses almost broke his spirit. Following the death of his first wife in 1546, he wrote: "The Lord has taken the half of myself from me. ... I am so affected by this blow that I feel like a stranger in my own house."

Viret's well-attested sense of humor helped make him effective in both communication and conciliation. His books are laced with puns and satire, his two favorite brands of humor.

For example, one of his dialogues considered the best way to exorcise demons. One of his characters piously declares that this could only be done by fasting and prayer. Another character quips, "What a splendid way to get rid of monks and priests, who after all are real devils. Don't give them anything to eat and pray for them."

Viret's sensitivity is also illustrated by his ideas concerning education. Addressing both educators and parents, he wrote: "Some children you will have to keep bridled, some you will have to coax, some will need no discipline, some will be motivated by liberality, some by rewards and promises, and others by honor. Treat each child according to his temperament and needs. Some will have to be treated like spirited horses, some like gentle asses, and some like stubborn mules."

Third, Viret was effective and popular in France and elsewhere because of his personal piety and his biblically based ministry. Some would argue that Viret was the most biblical of all of the French Reformers. He was certainly less dogmatic than Calvin or Beza.

Though he participated in many public disputations, Viret did not seek controversy. He once wrote in a war-weary vein to his old friend Farel, "If I did not have the conviction that it was God who was pressing it on, I would never enter a controversy with a single person."

Viret believed that though Christians were sometimes persecuted, they should never be persecutors. He stressed the ancient Christian teaching that "human life is sacred" and opposed the execution of alleged heretics. Viret's spirit of conciliation seemed to lead Catholics and Protestants alike to regard him as one of the few to whom they could turn when they needed a fair-minded arbiter.

Viret died in 1571 as he was preparing for a trip to the National Synod of Reformed churches at La

Rochelle. The Protestants in France greatly lamented his death. Jeanne d'Albrêt wrote to the Council of Geneva: "Among the great losses which I have sustained during and since the last war, I place in the forefront the loss of Monsieur Viret."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 71: The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion

The French Wars of Religion: Christian History Interview - A New War of Religion?

Pluralism and evangelicalism collide in contemporary France. A conversation with Sébastien Fath.

conversation with Sebastien Fath

In early summer the French Parliament passed anti-sect legislation that some evangelicals and members of other religious minorities fear could restrict their freedoms. This legislation is a far cry from Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, but it does raise questions about France's religious climate. To get a clear picture of the situation, Christian History contacted Sébastien Fath, a social scientist with France's National Center of Scientific Research and teacher at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

Why is France, a country that prides itself on pluralism and tolerance, suddenly suspicious of religious minorities?

Generally speaking, pluralism has never been so present in the French society. The challenge is learning to live together in a more and more plural society. The State has tried to adapt itself, but it isn't sure of its way yet. The local management of pluralism has its difficulties, too, but on the whole religious freedom is fully respected. Evangelicals, among other religious minorities, are very satisfied with it.

At the same time, though, French society reacts very strongly to the issue of cults and sects. The public was shocked by the collective suicides of the Solar Temple Order that occurred in Switzerland, Canada, and France in 1994 and 1995, when 78 people died. Also, France's political culture traditionally legitimates state intervention when social order seems threatened. Because the pluralistic society in France is less established than it is in America, cults and sects seem like a bigger threat. These elements explain why this law was voted in Parliament.

Is it fair to call France's anti-sect initiatives "religious persecution"?

The new legislation contains nothing related to "religious persecution." To imply this would be totally inappropriate. However, one can wonder at the necessity of such a law. Henri Tincq, a prominent French journalist, recently wrote in *Le Monde* that this law was "a progress for democracy." I wouldn't be so sure. Many believe that the existing legislation would have been quite sufficient to curtail the sectarian drift.

Whether the legislation might lead to religious persecution is a different question. The law contains provisions against "abuse of weakness or dependence," which seems to be very difficult to define. French evangelicals and other religious minorities have good reasons to fear that the new anti-sect legislation might encourage some localized forms of intolerance. Only time will tell if the actual application of the new law will lead to problems in the free practice of religion.

Does the specter of religious intolerance bring up any memories of the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion?

Unfortunately for French evangelicals today, outspoken evangelism appears to some parts of society as a new "war of religion." Proselytizing has bad press. The French media tends to favor a "religiously correct" picture of a respectful, modern religion that doesn't proselytize or defend an absolute truth on the public scene.

The best French sociologist of Protestantism, Jean-Paul Willaime, describes French culture as one in which religion is relegated to the private sphere. One can easily foresee the consequences for evangelicals. Active evangelism is their non-negotiable mandate, but it isn't well accepted culturally in

France—even if, in principle, the law cannot set any obstacles to it.

What other factors make evangelicals somewhat suspect in France?

The French are very proud of their republican model, and they resent the fact that, during the twentieth century, the main reference in the world became the American model. They also fear that their Republic, where the state assures equality of rights, will be swept away by a "limp democracy," where interest groups trample over the weaker members of society. This is why French leaders from General de Gaulle to Jacques Chirac (and his Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, born into a Protestant family) have tried to limit the American influence in France, often with symbolic measures like legislation against American words entering the French language.

This can sometimes create difficulties for Protestants, and specifically evangelicals who cultivate many links with American evangelicals. When Billy Graham campaigned in France in 1955, 1963, and 1986, he was regularly accused of being "an agent of American imperialism." French evangelicals have been aware of this difficulty for a long time and have learned to adjust to it.

But evangelicals get some positive recognition, too. A well known French Protestant hymn, "La Cévenole," recalls the heroic resistance of the Huguenots during the times of persecution. It has been nicknamed "the Marseillaise of the Protestants." This hymn was written by prominent evangelical pastor and hymn composer Ruben Saillens, a proof among others that French evangelicals are not an "imported product" and that they fit well in the French religious landscape.

Where do the descendants of the Huguenots fit in that religious landscape?

Huguenot descendants are found today in all categories of French society. Some of them have become indifferent to religious matters, others have become Catholic, and many have remained Protestant. Among the last group, a majority belongs to the Reformed Church of France (the main French Protestant denomination), but many can be found in evangelical churches as well—Free churches, Baptist churches, Brethren churches, and even Pentecostal churches.

The largest annual gathering of French Protestants, which draws about 20,000 people, is the Desert Assembly. Held the first Sunday of September in the Cévennes, in the south of France, it commemorates persecutions while encouraging and uniting Protestants today. The Reformed are the most numerous, but Lutherans and evangelicals are also present, a proof that the Huguenot heritage has been spread to all the branches of Protestantism.

One of the difficulties encountered historically by Huguenot families was the transmission of the faith. Because of persecutions, Huguenot identity became in some cases an inherited thing rather than a conviction, especially during the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth centuries. Evangelicals have strongly rejected such a restrictive definition. The idea of a Protestant "ethnic group" makes no sense to them, because they are concerned with conversion rather than family history.

Evangelicals in France numbered less than 100,000 around 1950. They're now about 350,000, a third of all French Protestants. To them as to the Huguenots of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, France remains a mission field where "salvation by grace only" must be publicly preached.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 71: The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion

The Huguenots: Recommended Resources

The Huguenots

In the July 27, 1998, edition of *Sports Illustrated*, columnist Frank Deford lamented, "I am from a forgotten tribe. Not lost, you understand. That's romantic: lost. My tribe is simply forgotten. I am a Huguenot. A French Huguenot. Who remembers us?"

If the number of books and Web sites is any indication, plenty of people remember the Huguenots and want to know who they were, what they believed, what they suffered, and where they went. Here are just some of the resources the authors and editors of this issue recommend.

Huguenots and their beliefs

History of the Rise of the Huguenots, by Henry M. Baird

The French Huguenots: Anatomy of Courage, by Janet Gray

The French Reformation, by Mark Greengrass

The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret, by Robert D. Linder

Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598, by Scott M. Manetsch

Agrippa d'Aubigné's Meditations sur les Pseaumes: A Protestant Genre for a Protestant Identity, by Alan D. Savage (forthcoming)

Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation, by Ronald S. Wallace

"The French Confession of Faith," at the [Creeds of Christendom](#) website

The French Reformed milieu

The Huguenots and French Opinion 1685-1787: The Enlightenment Debate on Toleration, by Geoffrey Adams

The Cleaving of Christendom, by Warren H. Carroll

Society and Culture in Early Modern France, by Natalie Zemon Davis

Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559-1685, by Raymond Mentzer and Andrew Spicer (forthcoming)

Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648-1789, by W.R. Ward

"The Path to Royal Absolutism," in the Library of Congress exhibition *Creating French Culture*, at the [Library of Congress website](#).

The Wars of Religion

Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris, by Barbara Diefendorf

Saint Bartholomew's Night, by Philippe Erlanger

"Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew," in *American Historical Review* 77 (1972), by Donald Kelley

Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572-1576, by Robert Kingdon

Tocsin pour un Massacre, la saison des Saint-Barthélemy, by Janine Garrison-Estèbe (in French)

"Wars of Religion" from *Le Poulet Gauche*, www.lepg.org/wars.htm

Huguenot refugees

History of the Huguenot Emigration to America, by Charles W. Baird
The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society, by Jon Butler
French Huguenots in English-Speaking Lands, by Horton and Marie-Hélène Davies
Huguenot Refugees in the Settling of Colonial America, by Peter S. Gannon
Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain, by Robin D. Gwynne
The Trail of the Huguenots in Europe, the United States, South Africa, and Canada, by G. Elmore Reaman
Memory and Identity: Minority Survival among the Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora, edited by Bertrand van Ruymbeke and R.J. Sparks (forthcoming)
"The Huguenot Historical Society," www.hhs-newpaltz.org (with links to the Huguenot Web ring)

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