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## Social Context for Religious Violence in the French Massacres of 1572

Shannon L. Speight  
*Wright State University*

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# Social Context for Religious Violence in the French Massacres of 1572

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Humanities

By

SHANNON LEE SPEIGHT  
B.A., University of Texas at Arlington, 2005

2010  
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Shannon Lee Speight ENTITLED Social Context for Religious Violence in the French Massacres of 1572 BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities,

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Kirsten Halling, Ph.D. Co-Thesis Director

---

Ava Chamberlain, Ph.D. Co-Thesis Director

---

Ava Chamberlain, Ph.D.  
Director, Master of Humanities Program

Committee on Final Examination

---

Kirsten Halling, Ph.D. Committee Member

---

Ava Chamberlain, Ph.D. Committee Member

---

Marie Hertzler, Ph.D. Committee Member

---

Andrew Hsu, PhD.  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

## ABSTRACT

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The project looks at violence as a social norm during the French massacres of 1572, causing widespread violence at a popular level, at the heart of which was religious group identity. The work examines outbreaks of fighting between Catholics and Huguenots starting in Paris with the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and spreading to provincial cities in the following months. Rather than viewing hostility as instigated from the top levels of society, this work aims to verify that there existed within France an acceptance of aggression that, encouraged by inflammatory religious rhetoric, resulted in the popular violence of the massacres. The work examines shared values contributing to a mind-set amongst urban commoners that tolerated and even valorized expressions of violence and led to the enthusiastic approval of brutality during the massacres of 1572. Expanding beyond a simple explanation of mob mentality, this paper is meant to expose patterns of thoughts and behaviors that created an opportunity for the masses to express themselves violently.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During the French Wars of Religion, localized conflicts evolved to engage the entirety of France in a bloody civil war lasting more than thirty years (1562-1598), encompassing unfathomable acts of violence like the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The violence of the massacre commenced on August 24, 1572, lasted nearly two months, encompassed a dozen towns, and ultimately reshaped the religious makeup of France. The historiography of the massacre has most often been framed from a top down perspective, viewing the events as primarily instigated by nobles vying for power.<sup>1</sup> The weak monarchy certainly left a void and caused political strife, but to consider the violence of 1572, predominantly perpetrated by urban commoners, exclusively from the view of the elite is innately limiting. Policies of the crown alternately persecuting and tolerating Huguenots led to a distrustful Protestant community and a bitter Catholic populace, but to focus on the royal family ignores the real perpetrators of the brutality. Viewing the bloodshed as initiated by the masses allows a different and more comprehensive picture to emerge.

Despite the political assassination that heralded the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the majority of the bloodshed had its roots in the effects of the Protestant Reformation. The intense hatred expressed by urban mobs during the violence arose not from political aspirations but a shared set of social values. These sentiments started with the dawn

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<sup>1</sup> See Kathleen Parrow's *From Defense to Resistance: Justification of Violence During the French Wars of Religion* and the collection of works within for examples of authors focusing on the nobility and peasantry but not on urban commoners.

of the Reformation as Catholics and Protestants lashed out at each other's alien symbols and traditions while battling for the soul of France.

Although historians throughout the centuries have analyzed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 and its ripple effect in a social context, most historians skim over the broader culture of violence that allowed for such bloodshed. Urban mob violence acted as a justifiable course of action amidst a sixteenth-century backdrop that viewed demonstrations of aggression and capital punishment as the norm. In Medieval France's violent culture, riots over taxes and rising food prices were not unheard of, but the introduction of religious change brought on by the Reformation intensified passions. Efforts by the Huguenots to carve out a place for themselves led to violent clashes between the two confessions. Printed propaganda and fiery sermons from ecclesiastics fueled religious tensions to dangerously high levels. In the face of an intense campaign against heretics, Catholics came to view their Huguenot neighbors as, at best, an alien entity or, at worst, subhuman.

Viewing the violence of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre within the social context helps to explain the motives of the crowds who participated, as well as the thoughts behind their behaviors. Although the massacre was more grandiose in terms of its toll on life, the actions of the urban mob were neither extraordinary nor unique to 1572.

## II. SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE: THE REFORMATION AND VIOLENCE

### Reformation Background

To explain the religious disturbances that occurred in France during the sixteenth century, it is first necessary to examine the effects of the Protestant Reformation. By the fifteenth century, the Great Schism had split Christianity into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Regardless of this break, the Catholic Church enjoyed a position in medieval Europe as the sole unifying form of Christianity prior to the Reformation.

Starting with Martin Luther's *The Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, the Reformation drastically changed the religious landscape of Europe. Luther preached that the Bible alone, *Sola Scriptura*, was one's only way to salvation thereby rejecting the authority of the papacy; but Luther did not go so far as to refute the sacraments or transubstantiation. Luther found willing allies in the German princes who resented papal authority and tax collection in their lands. The Scandinavian countries quickly adopted Lutheranism; Sweden's King Gustav I broke with the Church in 1531 over a conflict with a bishop appointment and in 1536, King Christian III recognized Lutheranism as the official religion of Denmark-Norway.

At the same time, other reformers were beginning to voice similar concerns regarding the Papacy and the Catholic Church. Huldrych Zwingli preached against the moral corruption of the clergy and denied transubstantiation in the Swiss canton of Zurich. In March 1536, the French theologian Calvin published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian*

*Religion.* Calvin's beliefs centered on predestination ideology stressing that God's grace alone allowed for salvation, while God's will decided eternal damnation. Calvinists rejected most of the Catholic sacraments, leaving only baptism and the Lord's Supper in which they rejected Christ's Real Presence stating that communion represented the Lord's spiritual presence. Following increased persecutions in France, John Calvin fled to the Swiss canton of Geneva, where he established a base for the Reformed Church from which he was able to support Calvinists in other states. Although the Netherlands were officially part of the Holy Roman Empire, the northern territories increasingly turned to Protestantism first as Anabaptist converts, then later as Calvinists under William I, Prince of Orange.

Calvinism also reached across Europe to the British Isles. Beginning in the 1530s Henry VIII began a series of breaks with the papacy including dissolving monasteries and naming himself the Supreme Head of the Church and clergy of England. Queen Elizabeth I finalized these reforms by incorporating Catholicism and Calvinist doctrine into the new state religion of England, Anglicanism. Following a break with their French allies, Scotland rejected the Catholic Church with the leadership of John Knox in 1560, in favor of a reformed church drawn primarily from Calvinist doctrine.

### Pre-Reformation France

While some of France's neighbors increasingly embraced Protestantism, the French populace's relationship with the Catholic Church did not promote the same large numbers of converts to the new faith as seen in other countries. Although there were numerous proponents for reforms within the Catholic Church, France as a whole was less hostile towards the papacy and not as threatened by Roman influence.

Roman Catholicism had been the official state religion in most of France since the beginning of the sixth century with the conversion of Clovis I. Since the thirteenth century French theologians had asserted that their national church held a privileged position concerning the papacy, a belief reinforced during the Avignon Papacy (1309 to 1378) in which seven popes ruled from a papal court in Avignon in southeastern France. During this time, French interests often dominated the Papacy, which led to substantial concessions by the Pope to the French crown especially in finances. This partisanship on behalf of the Church bred discontent amongst other states leading to the Western Schism that resulted in years of conflict between papal courts in France and Rome. The Church resolved the schism in 1417, but the years of the so-called “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” left a scar across Europe and weakened the authority of the Church.

The Avignon Papacy had helped the French Catholic Church operate under more autonomous conditions than in other states. In 1438, The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges resulted in the so-called *libertés de l’Eglise gallicane*. These Gallican liberties called for a general church council, with power superior to that of the pope, to be invoked every ten years, and forbade the papacy from collecting *benefices*, those endowments set aside for the maintenance of the clergy, or *annates* (a payment made to the papal treasury of one year’s revenue of this new *benefice*).<sup>2</sup> The Sanction of Bourges also guaranteed the independence of French cathedral chapters by allowing them to elect their own bishops and abbots, giving the French church a greater degree of autonomy.<sup>3</sup> This freedom led to a Church composed almost exclusively of French ecclesiastics, and ensured the loyalty of the clergy to the French realm by the time of the Protestant Reformation. While other states used the Reformation as a

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<sup>2</sup> Milton Viorst, *The Great Documents of Western Civilization* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*. 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 260-261.

way to refute the power of the Roman papacy and weaken the influence of foreign agents, the Gallican church was already far enough removed from Rome that a strong anti-clerical sentiment did not exist on any large scale.

In 1516, at the Concordat of Bologna, Francis I and Pope Leo X agreed upon a set of rights that granted the French king the power to nominate bishops. Although a victory for the king, the Concordat threatened France's Gallican liberties by bringing the Church under stronger monarchical control by allowing royal authorities to appoint bishops and lesser clergy members.<sup>4</sup> Although many feared a loss of individual freedoms for churches, the Concordat of Bologna continued to promote France's autonomy from Rome's oversight, preventing xenophobic sentiment against the clergy from arising in the general population. The majority of the populace continued to hold Catholic ecclesiastics in high esteem as valuable members of the local community. Thus, while abuses within the Catholic Church concerned many who called for reforms, the numbers of French Protestants remained low in comparison to the overall population.

With widespread support for Catholicism, the French continued to see themselves as a combined collectivity of people with one shared faith. The clergy enjoyed support from all levels of society; kings and peasants, different in all other aspects, united under the Catholic Church. To remain a country of "one king, one faith and one law" France was obliged to follow the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Authorities sporadically tolerated some believers who did not adhere to this stringent orthodoxy as long as they did not deviate too overtly from the state religion. Small pockets of Waldensians remained in remote regions, refusing to pray to saints, honor images or submit to priests deemed immoral, but their descendants

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<sup>4</sup>Mack P. Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France: 1500-1648* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

outwardly remained conformed to the established religion by attending mass and receiving the sacraments.<sup>5</sup> This was the greatest deviation allowed in France; a refusal to honor the traditions of Catholicism resulted in harassment, expulsion, or death.

In 1184, Pope Lucius III set up the *Episcopal Inquisition* to combat growing heresy and ordered that those not in communion with the Catholic Church be executed and their property sequestered. The institution's main targets were the aforementioned Waldensians and the Cathars in Southern France. While a few Waldensian families survived, a campaign launched by Pope Innocent III and primarily carried out by French knights mercilessly killed Cathars in the Albigensian Crusade (1208-1229). Throughout the thirteenth century, armies routinely carried out massacres in Cathar strongholds. Another Inquisition, begun in 1231, finished off the remaining Cathars so that by the beginning of the fourteenth century the entire sect had essentially been annihilated. Once the Inquisition had succeeded in its campaign against the Cathars, their attention turned towards the Jews, whom they feared were attempting to convert Christians. Philip IV expelled the Jews from France in 1306, only to allow their return nine years later before a Royal injunction forced them to leave the country permanently in 1394. These intense persecutions along with the expulsion of the Jews resulted in a pre-Reformation French realm where no one lived entirely outside the Church.

Since the time of Philip IV in the beginning of the fourteenth century, the French monarch adopted the title *Rex Christianissimus*, "most-Christian king."<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, national myths took shape linking France's prosperity and identity to its exemplary devotion

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Benedict, Barbara Diefendorf, and Virginia Reinburg, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," in *Renaissance and Reformation France*, ed. Mack P. Holt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 119.

<sup>6</sup> William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 8.

to the true faith, as embodied in the king's coronation oath to purge heresy from the kingdom.<sup>7</sup> France took its defense of the Catholic faith seriously, which united the French people by their common adherence to the Church. Amid the patchwork of provinces that made up late medieval France, Christianity defined the nation's common culture like nothing else.<sup>8</sup>

The sacraments provided parishioners with identifying markers for each stage of life. Baptisms incorporated the newborn into the Church, and an extensive network of godparents drawn from relatives and neighbors strengthened the communal spirit of the Church.<sup>9</sup> Confirmation marked the passage from childhood to adulthood; marriages were most often celebrated in the local parish, and the dying received absolution as part of extreme unction. Central to salvation was the celebration of the Eucharist at mass. Since Lateran IV, the papacy required weekly attendance at mass, gathering entire neighborhoods together in a shared ritual of sacrifice, prayer, hymns and communion, central to collective religious experience.<sup>10</sup>

The Church reached into the religious and social life of everyone and acted as a source of cohesion between family and neighborhood groups. The Catholic Church embodied the collective nature of Christianity and occupied a central position in the life of the parish serving many functions as the place where the community worshipped, celebrated feast days, baptized their children, and buried their dead. In addition to liturgical duties, the parish's pastor was also responsible for keeping records of births, marriages and burials.<sup>11</sup> The parish

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 119-120.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 119.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 123.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 124.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 125.

church was also central to the social life of parishioners, with church buildings often serving as a place to collect taxes, as meeting places for neighborhood assemblies, and as a venue for parishioners to conduct business.<sup>12</sup> For the late medieval man, the church was the center of communal life; as long as one remained within the confines of church doctrine, one remained a part of the community.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the majority of citizens deviated remarkably little from official church dogma, thereby retaining Catholicism as an identifiable value shared by all French people. The intrusion of evangelical Protestantism into the Catholic world shattered the French ideal of “one king, one faith, one law.” Instead of existing on the fringes of Catholic society, Protestant groups increasingly began to separate themselves by rejecting the traditions and symbols of the Catholic Church. While the Huguenots certainly considered themselves part of the French nation, their rejection of Catholicism led the bulk of the French populace to label the Huguenots as the “other.”

### Reformation in France

In spite of overwhelming support for Catholicism and condemnation from the Sorbonne, Protestant thoughts gradually filtered into France. French Calvinism had its origins in the humanist circles of Meaux, not too far from Paris in the Île-de-France region.<sup>13</sup> The *Cercle de Meaux* brought humanists together under the direction of the bishop in 1519, in an effort to implement reforms within the Catholic Church. The group’s emphasis on the study of the Bible prompted the suspicion of the Sorbonne and it was forced to disband in 1525. Although

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict, “Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence,” 121-122.

<sup>13</sup> Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 23.

most members of the *Cercle* remained Catholic, the group also included those who would later adopt Protestantism, including the founder of the Reformed Church in Geneva, William Farel. Despite the break up of the *Cercle de Meaux*, Protestant thoughts continued to spread through the 1520s and 1530s.

Surrounded by humanist friends, Francis I initially sought limited toleration of French Protestants for both personal and political reasons. The king was discouraged from persecuting early Protestant movements at the bequest of his sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême. Influenced by mysticism, Marguerite had displayed a deep interest in the Scriptures, and as a patron of the arts and scholarship had associates among the *Cercle de Meaux* reformers. Medieval mystics often claimed to have a direct spiritual connection with the Divine, and thereby attracted scrutiny for seemingly bypassing the hierarchy of the Church. Although she never strayed away from Catholicism, Marguerite's writings were so controversial that they came under fire by the Sorbonne. Francis intervened on behalf of his sister, and resented continuing attempts by the Sorbonne to dictate royal policy in regards to religion.<sup>14</sup>

Francis also restrained efforts to harass Protestants in order to solicit the aid of German Protestant princes, whom he hoped would join him in opposition to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. For much of his reign, Francis I was continually at war with Charles V over disputed territories. At the time, The Holy Roman Empire included Spain, the Low Countries, Milan and Franche-Comté, which essentially surrounded the French realm. The German princes, under the control of The Holy Roman Empire, also hoped to lessen the power and influence of Charles V. The Lutheran princes formed a protective alliance known

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<sup>14</sup> R. J. Knecht, *The French Civil Wars, 1562-1598* (New York: Longman, 2000), 180-181.

as the Schmalkaldic League and continued to come into conflict with Charles V throughout the sixteenth century. Francis's desire to limit the advances of Charles V kept the king from persecuting Protestants too heavily and allowed the Reformation to grow throughout France.

As their numbers increased, Protestants grew more emboldened and began to attack Church doctrine and property more openly. In October of 1534, a Protestant wave of iconoclasm during the Affair of the Placards ended Francis's conciliatory attitude. During the night of October 17, Protestants posted anti-Catholic placards around public buildings in Paris, Blois, Rouen, Tours and Orléans, including affixing one to the bedchamber door of Francis I. The broadsheets testified to the dangers of the "pompish and arrogant popish mass," repudiated transubstantiation, and ended with a promise that truth would "seek out and destroy the papists."<sup>15</sup> The inflammatory nature of the posters in addition to the Protestant defamer's ability to access the king's quarters caused a hardening in the policies of the crown against heretics.

In the months following the Affair of the Placards, royal authorities imprisoned some 400 Protestants with a reported 120 executed, including two dozen people in Paris alone, the largest heretic execution ever.<sup>16</sup> Catholics displayed their loyalty to the Roman Church by holding Holy Processions, and the king himself publicly affirmed his Catholic faith. In an effort to root out heresy, Francis was instrumental in setting up the *Chambre Ardente* (The Burning Room), a commission that operated as a court for the trial of heretics. Following Francis's death, Henry II zealously persecuted Protestants by increasing the activities of the *Chambre*, which sentenced more than 500 "Lutherans" in its first three years, holding more

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<sup>15</sup> Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, ed., *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: St. Martin's, 2008), 139.

than sixty executions.<sup>17</sup>

### Huguenot Growth

Despite increased efforts by the crown to extinguish heresy within the realm and strict censorship of all materials, Protestant ideology continued to spread. France's close ties with the Swiss cantons allowed for Calvinism's export directly from Geneva; by 1555, Calvin had formed Calvinist churches in Paris and Poitiers, and others soon followed. Following the death of Henry II, the crown passed to a succession of his young sons, under whose weak leadership the self-proclaimed *religion réformée* reached upwards of one thousand congregations.<sup>18</sup> Members of the French Reformed Church eventually became known as the Huguenots, reportedly in reference to the ghost Huguet said to haunt the Castle of Tours at night. By referencing Huguet, Catholics hoped to bring up sinister images of the Protestant's clandestine meetings that occurred under the cover of darkness.

During the sixteenth century, Protestant churches drew converts from all social classes and occupational groups. The rural peasantry remained the least influenced by the Huguenots, although areas under staunchly Calvinist lords or villages closely tied to urban centers recorded higher numbers of Protestants. The movement was most successful in cities and market towns, where ideas spread quickly and social mobility was greater. Higher rates of literacy and a strong influx of ideas from groups migrating to cities helped to bolster Huguenot numbers. Reformed communities were especially numerous in Normandy, the Loire Valley, and in a stretch from Poitou in Aquitaine across to Vivarais and Dauphiné, even representing the majority in the southern cities of Nimes, Montauban and Castres, as

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<sup>17</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 140.

well as making up nearly a third of the population in Lyon and a fifth in Rouen.<sup>19</sup> Despite some success in converting urban populations, the city of Paris remained overwhelmingly Catholic, with less than a tenth of Parisians adhering to the Reformed faith.<sup>20</sup> Although Protestant preachers had found eager converts in Paris, the city's position as capital and trade center made opposition to the Huguenots stronger than in outlying provinces. Those nobles and elites who chose to convert often retired to the country estates and those that remained were acutely aware of their minority status and seldom engaged in overt political activity.<sup>21</sup> While other towns permitted Huguenots to worship openly, Paris only allowed religious services for a brief time in late 1561 to early 1562.<sup>22</sup> The Catholic capital simply would not tolerate Huguenot heretics within its walls.

Regardless of their residence, Protestants were drawn from a large cross-section of society, as evidenced by the records of occupations of those executed following the Affair of the Placards. Among those executed were significant numbers of merchants and middle-class shopkeepers, plus a good number of "intellectuals" such as those employed by the Church and universities, printers, booksellers and lawyers.<sup>23</sup> Conversion efforts were most successful amongst middle ranks of merchants and those artisans employed in the most independent and literate fields.<sup>24</sup> It would appear that the Protestant emphasis on personal faith resonated with the sense of self-worth of these upwardly mobile urban groups.<sup>25</sup>

The Protestant faith held a strong initial attraction for magistrates and royal officers.

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<sup>19</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 141.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 141.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Prologue to a Massacre: Popular Unrest in Paris, 1557-1572," *The American Historical Review* 90, No. 5 (December 1985): 1071, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1859659> (accessed Feb.10, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Diefendorf, "Prologue to a Massacre," 1072.

<sup>23</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 141.

<sup>25</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 8.

In Toulouse, a particularly large number of minority officers were Protestant.<sup>26</sup> Despite early interest in Protestant teachings, many of the officers in the highest positions backed quickly away from the new religion following the crown's condemnation of heresy. For the most privileged, the declaration against Protestantism caused them to abandon religious inclinations in favor of the advantages enjoyed by royal officials.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, most upper level professionals remained Catholic. While many elites quickly turned away from the Reformed religion, the social mobility characterized by Protestantism's rejection of religious hierarchy attracted many lesser nobles to the faith. Alongside converts from the lower nobility, the Reformed faith also counted amongst its numbers some prominent members of the upper nobility, including Louis, Prince of Condé; Gaspard de Coligny, the Admiral of France; and Jeanne d'Albret, niece of Francis I and Queen of Navarre.

Though the number of Huguenot nobles remained low, their influence was large enough to bolster the Reformed community. The predominant makeup of the Huguenots continued to draw from artisans and the merchant class. From the point of view of public visibility and ideological force, the urban middle-class formed much of the base, although lower class and illiterate persons were often involved in the mass gatherings and iconoclastic outbreaks and figured prominently in the martyr rolls.<sup>28</sup> Even with converts from the urban poor, the lowest strata of society, unskilled workers and day laborers remained the least influenced by Reformed ideas.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Huguenots achieved some measure of success, the actual numbers of

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 141.

<sup>27</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 39-40.

<sup>29</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 141.

converts remained low, never accounting for more than 10-15% of the total population. Despite this, the sudden proliferation of Reformed churches, coupled with the disproportionate numbers of Huguenots among city dwellers and the nobility, heightened anxiety among the Catholic populace. In 1562, seven years after the first Reformed congregation, France officially recognized two different forms of Christianity in Catherine de Medici's January Edict of Saint Germain.<sup>30</sup> The Edict hoped to provide a middle ground between the two faiths by recognizing the existence of the Protestants and guaranteeing freedom of conscience and private worship while forbidding Huguenots to worship openly within towns. Rather than spreading a policy of toleration as hoped, Catherine de Medici's January Edict of Saint Germain in 1562 increased tensions and polarized the French people. In response, Catholics rallied around the symbols of their faith, encouraged by outspoken mendicant preachers who denounced the errors of the Reformed and reminded authorities of their sworn obligation to root out heretics.<sup>31</sup> The religious conflicts that arose during the French Reformation were reinforced by a society that tolerated and sometimes encouraged violent expression.

### Cultures of Violence

Displays of force were an endemic part of sixteenth-century society, but a "culture of violence" is not dependent upon political warfare, rather it is specific to actions of interpersonal violence. Cultures of violence are important frameworks through which

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<sup>30</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 146.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 145.

physical aggression is understood, justified, condemned, and controlled.<sup>32</sup> It is also necessary to note that ‘culture’ is not defined solely as a set of shared values among a group. Social organizations, psychological mechanisms and culture are mutually interactive, combining to create a more complex picture of why a segment of society participates in certain behaviors.<sup>33</sup>

In *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, Stuart Carroll identifies cultural values of the French nobility to explain high levels of violence found in sixteenth-century France. Carroll associates specific values found in the “warrior class” of French nobility, traits such as “aggression,” “individualism” and “competition,” as likely to increase violence.<sup>34</sup> While Carroll’s work explains rising levels of violence during the turbulent Wars of Religion, similar cultural values can likewise be associated with the common classes.

Aggression is not solely the domain of the nobility; numerous urban and peasant revolts can attest to the aggressive nature present in all classes of late medieval society. Carroll rightly identifies individualism as a source for increased aggressive behavior amongst nobles, but conformity can also be a component of violence. Donald Kelley’s *The Beginning of Ideology* identifies the values of “idealism, self-sacrifice, personal conviction, and selfless action towards a common course” as central to Protestant psychology.<sup>35</sup> These ideals caused Huguenots to express a sort of collective individualism in response to the traditional Roman Catholic faith. Religious riots of the sixteenth century showed that adherence to orthodoxy could also trigger violent behavior in which urban rioters acted upon shared values. The

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<sup>32</sup> John Carter Wood, “Conceptualizing cultures of violence and cultural change,” in *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Stuart Carroll (Basingstoke, NH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 92.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, “Conceptualizing cultures of violence and cultural change,” 92.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 57.

French Catholic populace's continual emphasis on tradition and its perceived state of endangerment inevitably caused a clash between the two confessions, opposing ideals. Eventually, both groups were able to turn towards a shared societal value prescribing violence as a valid method for settling conflicts.

Competition, although not on the same scale as amongst the nobility, was present in urban society and the rising "bourgeoisie" class. Competition for jobs and positions of influence increased the stakes in the Catholic-Huguenot conflict. Numerical superiority also drove religious disturbances. Towns with significant Huguenot minorities experienced more acts of religious violence as the two confessions vied for control, while towns with negligible Huguenot populations remained relatively calm.

### Violence in Sixteenth-Century France

Since the time of the Black Death, medieval life for most Europeans was unquestionably fraught with dangers and uncertainty. Following unequalled loss of life, Europe began a period of rapid growth and urbanization. A burgeoning middle class was beginning to arise as urban artisans, tradesmen and their guilds emerged as increasingly powerful forces. While towns dominated the political and social culture of France, they did not herald a decrease in violence. The thick city wall, common during the sixteenth century, symbolized the potential for violence in early modern society and defined exclusive rights afforded to city dwellers.<sup>36</sup> These walls secured urban society from the threat of outside attack and served to define the public space of townspeople as unique and separate from that of the peasantry.

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<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," in *Renaissance and Reformation France*, ed. Mack P. Holt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.

Although the walls protected municipalities from outside attack, they also served to prevent townspeople from fleeing the city in times of unrest. Crowded and unsanitary conditions and limited food supplies often led to violent outbursts in late medieval France. Rising food prices in response to increasing populations caused urban riots in Lyon in 1529 and Provins in 1573.<sup>37</sup>

The growing distinction between social groups in urban areas also led to increasing tensions in municipalities. France had long been divided into three orders: the clergy, nobles, and commoners, each dependent upon the other. In principle, these groups could exist peacefully despite inequality, but by the sixteenth century, commoners began to question the notion that the clergy and nobles contributed to the welfare for all. It was becoming increasingly evident to commoners that only money and power distinguished the two higher orders from themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, cities attracted large numbers of immigrants, many young men without local attachments, causing rates of violent crimes to increase. A record from fifteenth-century Dijon indicated that nearly half of all young men had participated in gang rape.<sup>39</sup> Although thievery and sexual crimes in urban areas were remarkably high, murder was uncommon. Seventeenth-century records from Lyon, one of the largest cities of the time, recorded a remarkable one homicide per year.<sup>40</sup> With relatively low numbers of murders, local authorities were far more concerned about collective rather than individual violence.<sup>41</sup>

While social and economic conditions certainly contributed to the violence of the

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<sup>37</sup> Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," 44.

<sup>38</sup> Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," 44.

<sup>40</sup> Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," 44.

<sup>41</sup> Dewald, "Social Groups and Cultural Practices," 44.

time, religious passions exacerbated these issues, increasing the fervor of participants in the conflicts. Religious violence is more intense because it connects intimately with fundamental values and the self-definition of a community.<sup>42</sup> Religion as a catalyst clearly amplified existing violent tendencies, transforming them into more brutal expressions. The easy identification of the feared and loathed “other” that resulted from the Huguenot-Catholic division best explains the widespread violence.

### Religious Rioters

Like most of Medieval Europe, France had a long history of violence and religious motivations, which often resulted in small, localized conflicts. Outbreaks of religious conflicts arose not only from a set of collective values held by either Catholics or Protestants, but also from cross-confessional beliefs and attitudes that reinforced violent behavior as an acceptable reaction in the face of a threat. Religious riots can be defined as any violent action, with words or weapons, undertaken against religious targets by people who were not acting under any given political authority.<sup>43</sup> This definition excludes those individuals whose primary aim was political gain as well as those who acted on direct behalf of the religious authorities, such as in the case of the Crusades. Those who perpetrated such violence were characterized as religious rioters by the fact that they were not acting officially and formally as agents of political or ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> Rioters, although not acting on behalf of these authorities, may still be prompted by political or moral traditions that legitimize and

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<sup>42</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 186.

<sup>43</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 153.

<sup>44</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 53.

even prescribe violence.<sup>45</sup>

Some historians see religious mob violence as guided by a deep psychological force. Janine Estèbe's *Tocsin pour un massacre* describes crowds participating in the religious violence as part of a collective unconscious harkening back to the rites of primitive tribes.<sup>46</sup> More likely, those participating in the events were part of a thinking society acting out specific forms of aggression in the face of the destabilization that accompanied the Protestant Reformation. In her groundbreaking work, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Natalie Davis suggests that expressions of religious violence demonstrated acceptable social behavior in the face of threats. The actors in the conflicts were not merely "miserable, uprooted, unstable masses" but people who had some stake in their community.<sup>47</sup> The rioters shared a culture that not only dictated their actions but also allowed for their behaviors. Urban rioters were deeply impacted by the Reformation; the rifts that arose divided families and neighborhoods as the two confessions competed for equal shares in their community.

It is also crucial to note that popular religious disturbances during the sixteenth century did not come from mindless mobs acting on the "passions" of the moment. Religious violence, regardless of the brutality exhibited, targeted explicit individuals to whom rioters applied distinct forms of punishment; the bloodshed was neither arbitrary nor infinite.<sup>48</sup> Crowds participating in religious disturbances had some sense that what they were doing was legitimate; the event somehow related to a defense of their cause, and their violent behavior

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<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Janine Garrisson Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre: La saison de Saint-Barthélemy* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1968), 197.

<sup>47</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 154, 186.

<sup>48</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 154.

had some manner of structure to it.<sup>49</sup> Far from inchoate groups, urban rioters often showed signs of organization before the onset of a disturbance. Confraternities, popular during the late Middle Ages, and other social groups helped to organize members beforehand.

Even with little or no planning, rioters could provide some structure to their actions by relying on their knowledge of notable events that took place in their communities.<sup>50</sup> These occasions allowed participants in disturbances to congregate at a known time and place, and served as the catalysts that placed the two confessions in opposition. Holy processions and other prominent religious ceremonies such as baptisms and burials often precipitated outbreaks of violence.

In some cases planning before and during a violent disturbance led to the circulation of a list identifying selected targets or communicated specific ways to recognize fellow participants. During the ensuing religious disturbances, district officials were often instructed to make a list of all Protestants residing in their districts along with orders to protect them; instead, Catholic mobs used these lists to round up Huguenots.<sup>51</sup> For Parisian mobs, such lists provided an easy way to target desired individuals. Similarly, participants in the riots needed easy ways to recognize their cohorts amongst the chaos. Partakers in the rioting placed crosses above their doors, or on articles of clothing. Password phrases like “*Le Loup*” and “*Vive la Croix*” identified compatriots.<sup>52</sup> Although bloodshed during religious disturbances may have superficially appeared disorganized and random, participants used varying amounts of forethought and collectively improvised their behaviors to achieve common goals

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<sup>49</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 187.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 184.

<sup>51</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 184.

more efficiently.

### Goals of Popular Religious Violence

If one assumes that the crowds partaking in acts of religious violence were composed of thinking individuals, rather than a collection of people acting out randomly, then the collective group must have a set of defined goals. For religious violence, the aims of the crowd usually reflect three main initiatives: to exert a perceived sense of authority, purge a taint from the municipality, and ultimately defend one's faith in the face of a threat.

First, crowd involvement in religious uprising often coincided with a perception that the appropriate authorities, whether political or religious, no longer protected the populace from the serious threat of heresy. Royal concessions to the Protestants portrayed an image to the Catholic populace that the Crown lacked a desire to exert the necessary punishment on the heretics. For their part, leaders of the Reformed Church spoke of malicious forces that threatened the security of the royal family and prepared to take justifiable action if needed to "protect" the king. Both confessions backed up their actions by presenting themselves as defenders of the realm by re-enacting the roles of magisterial authorities.

Second, religious violence at the popular level was often associated with a need to rid the community of a 'taint' brought on by religious deviants. Catholic crowds saw Protestantism itself as a spreading disease that threatened society. By undermining the Catholic Mass, Protestants jeopardized the health and salvation of the whole community.<sup>53</sup> In their attacks on the Church, Huguenots often preached against the taint of the clergy, recalling their lewdness and the use of concubines, in addition to attacking the perceived

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<sup>53</sup> Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 265.

diabolic nature of the Holy Mass and the worship of idols within the Catholic Church.<sup>54</sup> The danger to both confessions was intensely real, as both Catholics and Protestants feared a reprisal from God. The idea of stopping the spread of a disease was behind many rites of purification that occurred during outbreaks of violence.<sup>55</sup>

Once crowds had assumed authority and identified the source of the taint, the ultimate goal was to protect one's religion. For many groups, this often entails the defense of true doctrine along with a refutation of the false.<sup>56</sup> The French Catholic majority saw Huguenots' rejection of the sacraments and refusal to participate in traditional practices as a threat to the "true" faith, while Protestants equaled the idolatry of the Catholic Church to that of a "false" religion in the eyes of God. For both confessions, the defense of their faith as well as the refutation of the other was a strong motivator for violence.

Each of these aims presents an image of a group of people united by common goals that they achieved through a series of violent disturbances. For a clearer picture of the Catholic-Huguenot conflict brewing in sixteenth-century France, one must examine each of these goals to understand the motivations and fears of the group.

### Appropriating Authority

Crowds often acted out the roles of magistrates, seeing themselves not as mass murderers, but as judges responsible for enforcing rules and bringing criminals to justice. In this way, many religious disturbances began with the ringing of the tocsin as was traditional

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<sup>54</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 159.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 159.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 159.

for civic assemblies or emergencies.<sup>57</sup> Accounts from several religious disturbances often described scenes in which the murderers carried out mock trials of their victims before sentencing them to death. A group of youth retrieved the body of a Huguenot executed for thievery and killings, proceeded to elect lawyers and judges from amongst their lot and argued the sentencing of the man, even adding to the original sentence to include burning him as a heretic.<sup>58</sup> By performing these rites, crowds continued to see themselves as acting on behalf of authorities, and thus legitimized their actions. In some instances, priests and political officers were active players in the violence.<sup>59</sup>

Protestant ministers were more likely to preach that the Huguenots should wait for the appropriate authorities to act, but this advice did not stop some Protestant preachers from participating, such as Pastor Jean Ruffy who took part in the 1562 sacking of the Cathedral of Saint Jean in Lyon.<sup>60</sup> Protestant mobs participating in iconoclasm also ignored the preaching of the ministers who said that only the magistrates could eradicate idolatry. The commoners claimed that if one waited for the magistrates it should never be done.<sup>61</sup> Despite preaching to the contrary, Protestant ministers were often quick to excuse the actions of Huguenot mobs that chose to act. By dismissing Protestant iconoclasm, preachers enabled the rioting crowds to assume authority.

Following the January Edict of Saint Germain, Huguenots returned not only to the cities, but also to the center of daily life and politics. The return of these former rebels appeared as a monstrosity in the eyes of Catholics now confronted with the irony of having

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<sup>57</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 161.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 163.

<sup>59</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 165.

<sup>60</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 165.

<sup>61</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 163-164.

men previously found guilty of attacks on their beliefs and objects of worship now responsible for the defense of their rights, justice and traditions.<sup>62</sup> In the eyes of the French Catholics, the crown not only failed to root out heresy, but also to punish the Huguenots adequately for their insurrection during the Wars of Religion. In the absence of a political mechanism to combat the growing problem, Catholic crowds appropriated the right to prosecute heretics themselves.<sup>63</sup> The violence that surfaced during the massacres arose not only out of hatred of a dangerous ‘other’ but in response to a perceived failure by officials to persecute heresy.

#### Rites of Purification: Removing the ‘Taint’

Public executions were widely attended and publicized events during the late middle age. The ceremony of execution was a rite that affirmed the social and political order by punishing the body of the transgressor and proclaiming the mercy of God.<sup>64</sup> Crowds may have been witness to trials of heretics, which may have included having the blasphemers’ tongue sliced or pierced and offending hands cut off, or executions of traitors involving decapitation and quartering.<sup>65</sup> Although capital punishment was common during the sixteenth century, authorities reserved burnings for heretics, based on ancient notions about ritual purification that occurred through fire.<sup>66</sup> The execution of heretics was a liturgy in which the process of degradation of heretics proceeded from symbolic actions to an incineration

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<sup>62</sup> Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre*, 100.

<sup>63</sup> Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity During the French Wars of Religion* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2002), 155-178.

<sup>64</sup> Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, 209.

<sup>65</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 162.

<sup>66</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 11.

intended to expunge their memory forever.<sup>67</sup>

On October 7, 1546, fourteen Protestants were sentenced to death in Meaux for attending an illegal, clandestine meeting. They were to be France's first execution in a style reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition's *Auto de fé*, a death previously reserved for Jewish heretics, in which the condemned were placed in a circle in the center of the main market to be burned alive.<sup>68</sup> Executioners strangled the repentant before burning while the tongues of the unrepentant were cut out, to prevent any last blasphemies before they were burned alive.<sup>69</sup> To ensure that all memory of the event was expunged, authorities destroyed the place of the meeting, the home of Etienne Mangin, and erected a chapel in its place dedicated to the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.<sup>70</sup> This ancient rite purified the town of Meaux and restored balance to the municipality.

Once religious rioters decided that they had a justifiable right to act, they then set about to remove the populace that infected the French realm with heresy. Participants in religious disturbances drew upon a series of rites and rituals taken from popular festivals, liturgical practices, official executions, and folk justice to purify a community.<sup>71</sup> Purification rites could take the form of brutal murders or manifestations of more mundane attacks on non-living targets.

For Protestant crowds, idolatry was the most dangerous facet of Catholicism; hence, they focused their attention on the destruction of church property. Huguenots participated in iconoclastic attacks on churches and monasteries. Mobs adhering to the Reformed faith

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<sup>67</sup> Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 265.

<sup>68</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 192.

<sup>69</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 193-94.

<sup>70</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 195.

<sup>71</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 181.

defaced relics and statues in an effort to cleanse their towns of superstitious false idols. Protestants also attacked liturgical works by burning priests' manuals, the missals, and the breviaries.<sup>72</sup> These works represented an apparent taint on Christianity by perverting the uncorrupted Word of God found solely in the Bible. When Protestant crowds did target human life, their victims of choice were priests, monks, and friars.<sup>73</sup> Protestants primarily saw the idols that Catholics worshipped and their leaders as the source of their degeneration.

Catholic rioters also identified certain possessions of Huguenots as serious threats to their faith. Catholics burned books, primarily the French Bible which they equated to a dangerous gangrene that spread through the population corrupting the souls of France. Catholic mobs burned down the houses of those Protestants killed in riots or executed as heretics. By burning the homes of Huguenots, Catholics felt they were purifying the town while expunging the memory of the heretic. A major distinction between Catholic and Protestant violence was that Catholics attacked the physical body, while Protestants were more interested in attacking objects and symbols. Catholics used the allegory of fire by burning victims and their corpses in a literal purge. The depth of a well was the metaphoric gateway to Hell, and accounts of rioters throwing Protestants into wells suggested a literal connection with sending the heretic straight to Satan.<sup>74</sup> Catholics also dumped the living and the dead into local bodies of water in a forced "baptism." The rivers also served to carry many of the victims downstream thereby physically removing the taint of the heretics.

When examining acts carried out during religious disturbances, it is necessary to

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 174.

<sup>74</sup> Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-1610* (Seysssel, France: Champ Vallon, 1990), 290.

include the mutilation of corpses as part of the ritualistic killings that occurred. When examining religious disturbances from a modern perception, the gruesome details of the murders stand out and such brutality has sometimes been associated with traits exclusive to perverted societies. However, in legitimate practices of the time, religious crowds replicating such heinous acts were able to remain within the bounds of normal society. The main aim of these acts was to humiliate the heretic in a ritual that dehumanized the victim. Humiliation and bodily mutilation were closely linked and were largely incorporated into the trappings of official torture and execution in the sixteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The corpses of heinous criminals would be dragged through the streets and often mutilated in front of a large crowd. For rioters, dismembering their victims served to desecrate the memory of the dead. Huguenots who only saw the living as a threat did not usually carry out these acts, but to Catholics, the bodies of the dead represented an equal threat to the populace. Crowds that reenacted rituals from public executions hoped to demonstrate that their actions were warranted. The purification rites they carried out ultimately aimed to confirm their faith as the only true religion.

### Defense of the One True Faith

Participants in religious disturbances ultimately sought to install their religion as the rightful dogma, while dispelling the beliefs of their opponents. The two confessions acted out a series of exchanges of defiance, antagonism, and coldness that escalated over time into public insults and attacks on property.<sup>76</sup> Exchanges were governed by a notion of score keeping, maintaining a rhythm in which each challenge required a retort of rough

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<sup>75</sup> Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, 173-174.

<sup>76</sup> Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, 83.

equivalence.<sup>77</sup> At the heart of the Catholic-Protestant conflict was a clash between two divergent systems of sacred symbols, and the hostile images of the other faith that came to be attached to these symbols.<sup>78</sup> Protestant rituals and practices differed sharply from Catholic traditions; accompanying these ‘alien’ practices were dangerous deviations of beliefs.

At the center of the Reformed Faith lay a refutation of the sacramental rituals of the Catholic Church. Huguenots believed that only through God’s Grace could one achieve salvation, a fate that God had decided before one’s birth. As followers of Calvin, no amount of good deeds could increase one’s chance at achieving salvation; therefore, Huguenots denounced ‘good works’ and pilgrimages that made up an integral part of medieval Catholicism. Huguenots believed their doctrine to be purer, and thereby as “good” Christians, they deemed it necessary to oppose the sacred rituals of Catholicism. For the same reason, Huguenots rejected the hierarchy of the Church, which led to verbal and sometimes physical attacks on priests. Huguenots also dismissed the relics and idols of the Catholic Church, claiming that superstition and corruption were the only powers behind such relics. For Calvinists, these relics challenged God’s commandment against idol worship and the production of graven images, and numerous incidents of Protestant iconoclasm accompanied the spread of the new faith. Desecration of holy relics, on top of occasional violent attacks by Huguenots on members of the holy orders, infuriated the Catholic majority.

Catholic mobs often became enraged when they perceived a lack of respect for their sacred beliefs by the Huguenots. Inappropriate gestures breached courtesy, were antagonistic,

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<sup>77</sup> Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, 83.

<sup>78</sup> Philip Benedict, “The Wars of Religion, 1562-1598,” in *Renaissance and Reformation France*, ed. Mack P. Holt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148.

and were likely to cause offense.<sup>79</sup> For instance, the failure of a Huguenot to doff his hat when passing a holy relic, or the more serious offense of failing to kneel during a processional of the Holy Host were provocation enough to spark religious disturbances. Particularly disturbing for Catholics was the slandering of the Virgin Mary by Huguenots, and their mockery of the Holy Eucharist as a “god of flour.” Recalling France’s sworn responsibility to the true faith, Catholics demanded that these “dangerous and depraved souls” be punished.<sup>80</sup>

Over the next years, the two confessions became well versed in acts of religious violence. They followed a prescribed set of behaviors rehearsed numerous times in small disturbances. These conflicts worsened as the Huguenot-Catholic divide widened, partly due to a desire on behalf of the Huguenots to define themselves as wholly different from their Catholic counterparts. With Huguenot leaders already depicting their own otherness, Catholic propaganda seized every opportunity to reinforce the alien nature of the Protestants.

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<sup>79</sup> Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*, 87.

<sup>80</sup> Benedict, “The Wars of Religion, 1562-1598,” 148.

### III. RISING TENSIONS: CATHOLIC-HUGUENOT CONFLICT

#### Pure Christians as a Family of Believers

Early Calvinist movements, once fragmented about France, unified into a collective body by the middle of the sixteenth century. As Huguenot numbers grew, so did the necessity for a cohesive ideological philosophy. Common themes for Huguenot polemics were Calvinism as a “purer” state of Christianity, the Reformed Church as an adoptive family, and an emphasis on Protestant martyrdom. Propagandists and church leaders used these themes to build a spiritual community with shared values.

Central to Protestant ideology was a belief that the “Reformed” Church was, as its name implied, a reformed faith, unpolluted by Roman Catholicism. This purity of belief theorized that the Protestant religion was closer to the original Christianity as inspired by Jesus Christ. The French Reformed Church grew out of Calvin’s Genevan church; Huguenot congregations followed Calvinist teachings of the Reformed religion as successor to an ancient church. By connecting their embryonic religion to the beginnings of Christianity, Huguenot leaders could promote change under the guise of preserving tradition or harkening a return to an earlier and better state.<sup>81</sup> In order for one to achieve this purer form of Christianity, it was often necessary for converts to turn away not only from the old faith, but from their relatives and neighbors as well.

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<sup>81</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 307.

Protestant rhetoric revolted against the paternal authority of the clergy and sought to instill a universal body of believers. For those who chose to leave the traditional for the Reformed faith, it was sometimes necessary to distance themselves from relatives and neighbors. On one hand, the Reformation praised the values of family life, but on the other, it made little acknowledgment of kin beyond one's closest relatives.<sup>82</sup> The Reformed Church emphasized one's responsibility to one's spouse and children building up the immediate family while breaking down bonds between aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and cousins. While extended familial ties had defined medieval society, the Reformation led to a disintegration of the larger clanship, as families chose to convert to the new faith or remain loyal to the established religion. For those that converted to the Reformed faith supplanted the extended biological and even nuclear family with a new spiritual family.

The decision to abjure Catholicism in favor of Protestant beliefs was primarily an individual decision. In many cases, whole families converted, but in other instances family members converted at separate times or not at all. A sample of Protestant women from Toulouse and Lyon showed no evidence that wives followed their husbands' conversion or vice-versa, but some cases did point to a husband or and wife converting while their spouse remained "polluted in idolatry."<sup>83</sup> In some instances, those who converted came from the traditionally disenfranchised: a number of female converts were widows. Converts who turned away from the paternal hierarchy looked towards Huguenot pastors as substitute fathers. Such was the case of the French theologian Theodore Beza, whose blood family was replaced "psychologically" and "honorifically" by John Calvin as father and Beza's fellow

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<sup>82</sup> Marzio Barbagli, *Family Life in Early Modern Times*, ed. David I. Kertzer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 258.

<sup>83</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 81.

exiles as brothers and sisters.<sup>84</sup> Huguenot converts substituted confessional roles for familial ones and replaced blood ties with ideological ties to the new faith.<sup>85</sup>

While a mutual practice of the Reformed faith strengthened some families, others witnessed a breakdown in the ties of kinship when Huguenots replaced blood ties with a spiritual family. This spiritualized domestic community, although not constituted on bloodlines, nevertheless preserved some psychology and morality of kin relationships.<sup>86</sup> Acting like a familial unit, Huguenots were able to survive in a hostile environment. Huguenots could look to their fellow confessionalists to assist them in times of crisis and defend them when threats arose. Calvinist pastors tapped into the idea of a shared family to promote both order and stability within congregations. The religious doctrines of the faith reinforced the concept of a collective group. In this way, Calvin taught that baptism was not a washing away of sins as in Catholicism but a “sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church.”<sup>87</sup>

Although these confessional bonds helped to unify and strengthen the Huguenot community, they ultimately led to an alienation of the Catholic majority. Catholics described Protestantism in the 1560s as a source of divisiveness and chaos that upset the “natural” hierarchy between men and women, children and parents, subjects and rulers.<sup>88</sup> Religious divides shattered familial bonds and disrupted the social balance within local communities. Once ties were broken amongst family and neighbors, few allies were willing to risk personal safety for those Huguenot kin who had chosen to distance themselves. This breakdown in

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<sup>84</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 57.

<sup>85</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 56-57.

<sup>86</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536 edition)*. ed. and trans., Donald K. McKim (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2000), 148.

<sup>88</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 83, 86.

society heightened tensions and opened the way for more stringent Catholic persecutions. The increased harassment of members of the Reformed church ultimately resulted in the most defining feature of Huguenot identity, the concept of martyrdom.

### Huguenot Concepts of Martyrdom

Huguenots were part of a Reformed family in life and those martyred for their faith could expect to join a family of saints persecuted since the dawn of Christianity. Huguenots drew a direct connection between their current oppression and past accusations leveled at the early Christian church. They were able to create a sense of community with the past through a psychological link to the early church, as well as a contemporary manifestation of a true Christian.<sup>89</sup> The act of martyrdom allowed members of the Reformed community to affirm both verbally and physically the power of belief and helped to legitimize the Protestant cause by linking themselves to the ancient church. Calvinist martyrs attempted to console fellow Reformers and explicate the endemic brutality of their situation by resorting to an Old Testament framework in which Calvinists identified themselves as the Children of Israel in Egyptian bondage.<sup>90</sup> By linking their current situation to trials and tribulations of past prophets, Huguenots reinforced a belief in a direct inheritance from the ancient church.

For Huguenots, the most effective testimony and publication of one's faith was martyrdom.<sup>91</sup> Protestant propagandists hoped to capitalize on these "acts of faith" by publishing chronicles of the lives of martyrs. The influential martyrologists Jean Crespin,

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<sup>89</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 120-121.

<sup>90</sup> Charles H. Parker, "French Calvinists as the Children of Israel: An Old Testament Self-Consciousness in Jean Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs* before the Wars of Religion," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, No. 2 (Summer 1993): 230-231, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2541949> (accessed Apr. 7, 2010).

<sup>91</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 119.

John Foxe, and Ludwig Rebus all worked from the ideology that Protestant sacrifice was part of a fundamental continuum from the martyrs of the ancient church to the present.<sup>92</sup> The blood of Huguenot martyrs fueled the Reformed Church just as the deaths of previous saints fed the early Christian church. For Huguenots, martyrdom was neither a passive nor a mournful activity, but a “joyful sacrifice” associated with the “honorable sacrifices” of early Christian persecutions.<sup>93</sup> Chroniclers of the martyrs drew attention to their humble nature. The prominent Protestant lawyer, Nicholas Pithou, recorded the professional and social status of each martyr as a reminder that through “God’s providence” extraordinary things could come from and happen to ordinary citizens.<sup>94</sup> The martyrologists were anxious to record not only the pious lives of individuals, but also the supreme peace and resolve with which each Protestant “saint” met his or her fate. Accounts of these martyrs spread throughout the realm helping strengthen the resolve of converts while attesting to the Huguenot’s commitment to their faith.

Although popular accounts of Protestant martyrs circulated widely by the 1550s, the Affair de la Rue de St. Jacques cemented Huguenot conceptualization of martyrdom.<sup>95</sup> In September of 1557, a Huguenot congregation gathered at a home located on the Rue de St. Jacques near the Sorbonne in Paris. Alerted to the presence of the Protestants, some 400 Parisians, alongside priests from the College of Plessy, blocked the entrance to the house, gathered stones, and started bonfires.<sup>96</sup> The angry mob attacked worshipers as they attempted

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<sup>92</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 143.

<sup>93</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 127.

<sup>94</sup> Mark Greengrass, “Nicholas Pithou: experience, conscience, and history in the French civil wars,” in *Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honor of Patrick Collinson*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>95</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 65.

<sup>96</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 91.

to flee, eventually overrunning the house and slaughtering most of the Huguenots, sealing their fate as Protestant martyrs.

Protestant theologians used accounts like the deaths at the Rue de St. Jacques to attack Catholics by proclaiming Huguenot martyrs as victims of a righteous war. While theologians solidified Reformed ideology, Calvinist propagandists also went on the attack. Protestants attacked the clergy as lecherous and immoral and drew a connection between the Holy See and the devil himself. Protestant broadsheets also belittled Holy Processions and pilgrimages through satirical print. Protestant authors contrasted depictions of a corrupt and inept Catholic Church with portrayals of pious and learned Protestant leaders.<sup>97</sup> These successful print campaigns primarily occurred outside of France where German Lutheran and Swiss Calvinist leaders allowed their free circulation. In France, since Catholicism remained the religion of the king and most of the nobility, the spread of virulently anti-Catholic pamphlets was less rampant. Nevertheless, works attacking the clergy and Catholicism circulated through France, breeding bitter sentiments among the Catholic majority.

### Catholic Rhetoric: From Print to Pulpit

The ideological differences of Protestant thought, coupled with Protestant rhetoric condemning the established religion and its traditions, further stigmatized Huguenots as outsiders. Demonology was the Catholic response to Protestant hagiography.<sup>98</sup> Early in the French Reformation, the Catholic leadership spawned the idea that Huguenots were monsters in the eyes of God, a recurrent theme used both in printed materials and in the sermons of

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<sup>97</sup> For a look at Protestant propaganda in Germany, see Bob Scribner's *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>98</sup> Donald R. Kelley, "Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew," *American Historical Review* 77, no. 5 (December 1972): 1329, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1861309> (accessed Apr. 7, 2010).

priests. Catholic antagonists slandered Huguenot women and attacked a perceived feminization of society that accompanied the Protestant faith. Finally, Catholics attacked Huguenots as a dangerous, seditious group, who destabilized France with their treasonous acts. Unlike Protestant reformers, who attempted to convince their audience of the necessity of change, Catholic authors chose to reinforce the dangers of straying from tradition, appealing to the wisdom of remaining faithful to the established religion.<sup>99</sup>

Widespread support of the Catholic majority allowed propagandists the freedom to publish works harshly condemning Protestants without fear of offending the masses. Unlike circumstances in Calvin's Geneva or Luther's Germany where Protestants enjoyed broad support of the people, Catholics had the ear of the common folk in France.<sup>100</sup> The resulting creation of print culture, the sixteenth-century concept and term "propaganda" (*propaganda fidei*), ramped up both Catholic and Protestant promotion of printed ideas.<sup>101</sup> The relatively free press in Swiss and German states that allowed Protestant literature to disseminate quickly contrasted starkly with the strict censorship that operated in France.

In France, Catholics enjoyed the whole-hearted support of the printing industry as well as the universities and the Parlement in Paris, whereas Protestants looked to Geneva for guidance.<sup>102</sup> As early as 1537, authorities combated Protestant ideas by compelling printers to send copies of all works to the royal library in Blois, where the faculties of law, medicine, and theology examined each new publication for any signs of heresy.<sup>103</sup> In 1539, a royal decree prohibited printers from issuing anonymous or pseudonymous books to ensure that the

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<sup>99</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 46-47.

<sup>100</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 46.

<sup>101</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 244.

<sup>102</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 21.

<sup>103</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 241-243.

authorities could locate those responsible for writing the suspect work.<sup>104</sup> In 1544, the Sorbonne published its Catalogue of Censured Books, banning works by Luther and Calvin, in addition to those of Humanist writers like Rabelais and Dolet.<sup>105</sup> From then on, French printing operated under strict censorship, preventing Protestant works from originating within the French realm. Such censorship merely increased the public's appetite for Protestant works that flooded in from Geneva. Attempts by Calvinist leaders to reinforce French Protestants through Genevan channels led to the banning of books printed in Geneva in 1548.<sup>106</sup> With control of printing, Catholic leaders were able to combat heresy with a rabid intensity; the words printed in Catholic propaganda most likely paled in reflection to what Catholics would have heard in priests' sermons.<sup>107</sup>

Rather than fighting on the battlefield, the laity and religious authorities waged the war for the soul of France in the cities. In some cases, priests directly reached the literate population, such as the Jesuit Possevino in Lyon, who paid for the printing of orthodox booklets and distributed them free on the streets.<sup>108</sup> Although the sixteenth century saw a growth in the urban literate population, literacy rates remained low, especially among the poor and women of both faiths. Oral communication remained the best way for preachers to reach the masses. Celebrated preachers commanded large audiences, and theologians were better known for their ability to speak than for writing.<sup>109</sup> The position of priests gave them the unique ability to reach both the learned and illiterate with their passionate words. Deeply

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<sup>104</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 241-243.

<sup>105</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 241.

<sup>106</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 15.

<sup>107</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 222.

<sup>109</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 37.

woven into the fabric of French society, Catholic pastors held a position of high influence. Preaching constituted the greatest point of contact between the clergy and the laity during the sixteenth century.<sup>110</sup> Priests were locals, typically sons of their community who continued to live alongside them. They inherited property, served as godparents to relatives and neighbors, drank at local taverns, and suffered the same economic hardships as their neighbors.<sup>111</sup> The priest's connection to his neighbors, as well as his place of reverence, allowed ample opportunities to influence the emotions and actions of locals.

Preachers turned Parisian churches into virtual political clubs, and they had no difficulty in arousing feelings of mistrust towards the Protestants. From the pulpits, they rained abuse and threats on those who practiced treasonous leniency towards the Huguenots.<sup>112</sup> Priests were able to dictate reactions of the common person to issues concerning public or royal policies on religious matters. Parisian preachers like Simon Vigor and Jean de Hans spoke openly against the edicts of pacification as a betrayal of the true religion.<sup>113</sup> Influential clergy members focused their attentions on ensuring that public opinion did not falter in the face of conciliatory movements made by the royal court. Simon Vigor called for the revocation of the Edict of Saint-Germain and proclaimed that the king should force the Huguenots to return to the Catholic Church by “depriving them of their properties and reinstating the punishment of execution by burning.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Alfred Soman, “Press, Pulpit and Censorship in France before Richelieu,” *American Philosophical Society* 120, No. 6 (Dec.1976): 440, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986598> (accessed Feb.10, 2010).

<sup>111</sup> Philip Benedict and Virginia Reinburg, “Religion and the Sacred,” in *Renaissance and Reformation France*, ed. Mack P. Holt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126.

<sup>112</sup> Henri Noguères, *The Massacres of Saint Bartholomew*, trans. Claire Engel (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 39.

<sup>113</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 11.

<sup>114</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 156.

Beyond stirring up resentment among the Catholic community over concessions made during the edicts of pacification, Vigor also called down the wrath of God in response to the proposed marriage between the Catholic princess Margaret and the Protestant Henry of Navarre. In a sermon delivered shortly before the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Vigor proclaimed that "Dieu ne souffrira pas cet exécrationnable accouplement" (God will not suffer this execrable coupling).<sup>115</sup>

Preachers were often able to turn the tide of a crowd, bolstering resolve through the Word of God. Zealous Catholic preachers compared heresy to cancer or gangrene that needed to be cut from the body.<sup>116</sup> Through such rhetoric, priests were able to clandestinely, or overtly call for action from the people. Although Vigor never outright told Catholics to kill Protestants, the Jesuit laid the foundations for such actions by urging Catholics to pray to God to "exterminate" the Huguenots.<sup>117</sup> Popular preachers were hugely influential in disseminating specific religious or polemic messages, and vigorous preaching during this period often resulted in outbreaks of violence on both sides.<sup>118</sup> Riots that broke out in 1562 in Gien and Rouen both occurred shortly after sermons given on Deuteronomy 12, which opens with a commandment to destroy the altars and pillars of pagan worshipers.<sup>119</sup>

### Demonization of Huguenots

Catholic polemics engaged the public with their demonizing rhetoric and drew upon a series of common accusations to reinforce this idea. Through print and propaganda,

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<sup>115</sup> Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre*, 103.

<sup>116</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 156.

<sup>118</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 38.

<sup>119</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 166.

Huguenots were systematically demonized until they not only existed as the other, but as “non humans.”<sup>120</sup> Catholic leaders compared the heretics to beasts and used stereotypes of animals to transfer loathsome feelings to Huguenots. Propaganda compared Huguenots to donkeys, equating them to large-eared and stupid pack animals and to wolves or rabid dogs whose savagery and nasty bites were to be feared.<sup>121</sup> Catholic antagonists also compared the Reformed to roaches, vultures, pigs and snakes, all considered vile animals.<sup>122</sup> The object was to depict the Huguenots as repulsive creatures wholly separate from the Catholic populace. Once they classified Huguenots as monsters, Catholics were able to execute crimes against them with little regard for human life.

Catholic leaders engaged their audiences with their demonizing rhetoric and leveled a series of common accusations at the Huguenots to reinforce this oratory. Themes such as the clandestine orgies said to occur at Protestant meetings were fed by rumors and fueled by written accounts. Catholic authors played an active role in propaganda and fulfilled the expectations of their Catholic audience by perpetuating tales of Huguenot indiscretions.<sup>123</sup> Catholic authorities reintroduced common myths and accusations previously levied against Jews to attack the Protestants.

During the sixteenth century, much of the anger towards Jews had grown out of the medieval suspicion surrounding the “blood libel” myth, which alleged that in order to thrive, Jews required a blood sacrifice of Christian children. Many Catholic propagandists carried the blood libel myth over to the French Huguenots. The humanist writer Desiderius Erasmus

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<sup>120</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu*, 262-263.

<sup>122</sup> Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu*, 265-269.

<sup>123</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 49.

even used blood libel in his book on the concord of the church in 1533, which reported nightly gatherings where men and women consorted in “promiscuous love” and mothers “freely handed over their children to be butchered.”<sup>124</sup> The uses of blood libel by such an influential writer gave credence to the rumors that were already spreading throughout France. Catholics encouraged this belief by arousing suspicions concerning the clandestine nature of Protestant gatherings.

Catholic persecution of the Jews often referred figuratively and literally to poisonings. Catholics accused Jews of poisoning wells earlier in the Middle Ages, and propagandists used the same literary allusion for Protestants during the French Reformation. The Catholic theologian and Sorbonne professor Antoine de Mouchy argued that Protestants should be burned (as were Jews for poisoning the wells during the reign of Philippe V) for “poisoning the souls with false doctrine.”<sup>125</sup> Two months after the Edict of Saint-Germain, Simon Vigor gave a sermon warning his flock “in the end they [the Huguenots] will kill you, either by poison or by some other means.”<sup>126</sup> By associating Protestants with a long list of heretics, Catholic polemicists sought to justify their persecution, as part of centuries of characterization of heretics that had become ingrained in the culture of western Christendom.<sup>127</sup>

The conciliatory policies and new edicts of Catherine de Medici allowed Protestant groups to gather more openly. With Huguenots no longer forced to sneak around in the dark, Catholic antagonists found it increasingly difficult to level accusations of blood sacrifice and

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<sup>124</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 59 referencing Erasmus’ *liber de sarcienda Ecclesia concolorida deque sedandis opinionum dissidiis* (Basel 1533).

<sup>125</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 57.

<sup>126</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 156.

<sup>127</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 60.

poisonings against them. Nevertheless, Catholic leaders had succeeded in firmly planting an image of Huguenots as monsters in the minds of much of the Catholic populace and had built up a repertory of accusations to evidence God's displeasure at the presence of the heretics. Simon Vigor like most preachers of the time interpreted natural disasters, droughts, and the "birth of misshapen monsters" as warnings to return to the true doctrine.<sup>128</sup> An outbreak of plague occurring in Lyon in 1564 offered the Jesuit preacher Edmond Auger an opportunity to remind the Lyonnais how they had suffered under Huguenot occupation only a year before.<sup>129</sup> Priests were instrumental in encouraging violence by interpreting adverse events as signs of God's displeasure over a lack of commitment in battling heresy. In 1577, priests blamed the defeat of French forces at the Battle of Saint Quentin on God's wrath over the presence of heretics in the realm.<sup>130</sup> Preachers successfully entwined the humiliating defeat with anxiety arising from the spectacle of a growing Huguenot community. These tensions built up and later that same year the infamous attack at the Rue de St. Jacques took place.

By demonizing the Protestant faith, Catholics hoped that their audience would remain within the folds of the Church and that they could lessen the evangelical movement's spread. The violent polemic of Catholics focused on recurrent themes that appealed to a "demand" from the Catholic community and enjoyed relative success.<sup>131</sup> Beyond blaming Huguenots for bringing disaster to France, the Catholic clergy argued that Protestant teachings feminized

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<sup>128</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Simon Vigor: A Radical Preacher in Sixteenth-Century Paris," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, No. 3 (Autumn 1987): 403, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540725> (accessed Apr. 7, 2010).

<sup>129</sup> Jean-Pierre Gutton, *La société et les pauvres: L'exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534-1789* (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1970), 171-172.

<sup>130</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 167 quoting Jean Crespin's *Histoire des martyrs* (Geneva, 1585).

<sup>131</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 48.

society, and attacked the “slanderous” nature of Huguenot women and the chaos that such women brought upon the community.

### Protestant Women and the Feminization of Society

Catholic polemics attacked Protestant women for a perceived degradation in morality that they claimed initiated with a rejection of the Virgin Mary. Literacy especially among Protestant females remained particularly low, causing Huguenot women to attend reading circles. These circles gathered men and women, often from different families together to listen to vernacular readings of the Scriptures. Although Catholic women surely attended literary circles, the illegality of Protestant texts coupled with coed clandestine meetings encouraged tales of less than scrupulous encounters. At such secret night meetings, Catholics accused women of giving themselves freely to men in order to win over converts to the new religion. The Provins’s priest Claude Haton described “Lutheran” husbands unashamed that their wives “lent and abandoned themselves to win over men who wished to follow their false religion.”<sup>132</sup> Rather than portraying “loose” women as attracted to the Reformed faith, Catholic leaders depicted Protestantism as perverting previously pious women. “Most, when they first went, were chaste wives and girls, but on their return were whores and sluts.”<sup>133</sup> Once Huguenots could meet openly in the daylight, accusations of debauchery were less effective. Regardless, Haton describes that once these heretics freely congregated during the day, they would steal away to the country to “give themselves over more freely to their

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<sup>132</sup> Claude Haton, *Mémoires contenant le récit des événements accomplis de 1553 a 1582*, ed. Félix Bourquelot (Paris, 1857), 49.

<sup>133</sup> Haton, *Mémoires contenant le récit des événements accomplis*, 50-51.

pleasures and the satisfaction of their desires.”<sup>134</sup> While portraying Protestant women as morally corrupt, Catholic leaders also pointed to a perceived breakdown in the traditional separation between women and men.

Protestant propaganda identified a good Christian woman by her relationship with the Scriptures. For Huguenots, a woman’s “sexual purity and control” directly corresponded to her interest in the Bible and her right to read the New Testament in the vernacular.<sup>135</sup> Catholics argued that direct engagement with the Scriptures belonged to the masculine domain of theology, and saw women’s engagement with the Word of God as questioning the social superiority of men. Catholics drew on a general repertory of female stereotypes to identify Protestantism with the female traits of ignorance, sexual wantonness, changeability, and in severe cases hysteria.<sup>136</sup> The French historian and Bishop of Avranches, Robert Ceneau, alongside René Benoist, confessor to Mary Stuart and later Henry IV, expressed alarm at a perceived feminization of society brought about by the Reformation. Both authors accused the Reformation’s success on the fact the men were showing weakness and a dangerous attraction to novelty, two innately female traits.<sup>137</sup> Women were weak and seduced by the new faith because of its novelty rather than its potency.<sup>138</sup> The perceived feminine traits of pusillanimity, the inability to follow rules, and foolishness were all associated with the Reformation, and allowed Catholic authors to appeal to the consensus of their audience in the belief that men were superior to women.<sup>139</sup> Catholic polemics also turned to the word

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<sup>134</sup> Haton, *Mémoires contenant le récit des événements accomplis*, 51.

<sup>135</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 91.

<sup>137</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 89.

<sup>138</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 92-93.

<sup>139</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 89.

*femmelette* to describe this feminizing of society. In its modern connotation, *femmelette* denotes a weak, effeminate man and in its usage during the Reformation, the term described both ignorance and the blurring of gender roles.<sup>140</sup> By giving power to women, Catholic authors attempted to demonstrate that Protestantism was interested in overturning all order.<sup>141</sup>

Although Catholic portrayals of the *femmelettes* meant to heighten fears of the “world turned upside down,” the reality did not reflect an actual increase in the participation of women in spiritual affairs. Misogyny was a common cultural feature of the sixteenth century, and transcended confessional differences. John Calvin reiterated the dominance of men, stating in a letter, “If men are fragile and easily troubled, the weakness of your sex is even greater, according to the laws of nature.”<sup>142</sup> As with Catholics, Protestant males denied women all merit; clearly the real targets were Protestant ministers and Catholic husbands, in both cases men.<sup>143</sup> Rather than representing any actual tenet of Calvinist belief, Catholic accusations of female equality and the feminizing of society were another way to discredit the Protestant cause and reinforce the otherness of Huguenots.

Rising tensions along with the uncompromising rhetoric of evangelical propaganda encouraged a stricter definition and enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy.<sup>144</sup> With a more defined sense of what it meant to be Catholic, members of the Reformed faith clearly stood out as heretics and deserving of punishment. Over time, Catholics shifted the focus from a debate solely about heresy or immorality to questions of Huguenot loyalty to the crown.

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<sup>140</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 92.

<sup>141</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 97.

<sup>142</sup> Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, “Calvin’s Letters to Women: The Courting of Ladies in High Places,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 13, No. 3 (Autumn 1982): 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539605> (accessed Apr. 7, 2010).

<sup>143</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 98.

<sup>144</sup> Benedict, “Religion and the Sacred,” 138.

## Huguenot Insurrection

During the Reformation, some Protestants began to formalize thoughts concerning a ruler's ability to oppose the religious authority of the Roman Church. Lutheran princes in the Holy Roman Empire were in the process of establishing Protestantism as the official religion in their lands, and Henry VIII had declared himself head of the Church in England, while abolishing many of the rights of the clergy. In these lands, Protestant ideology helped to legitimize the ruler's actions, but such arguments were useless in France where Gallicanism was already a state religion of sorts.<sup>145</sup> Protestants in parts of the Netherlands and England, as well as those in some German and Swiss states, could openly defy the teachings of the Catholic Church without becoming traitors to their rulers. Protestants in France were less fortunate as the close relationship between the crown and Catholicism gave rise to the argument that Huguenots acted upon heretical beliefs. It also allowed Catholics to accuse them of dangerous acts of sedition. In 1560, a failed attempt to kidnap the young King Francis II brought this debate to the forefront.

Following the death of Henry II in 1559, Francis II ascended to the throne at only fifteen years of age and married Mary Stuart shortly thereafter. Although his mother, Catherine de Medici, acted as regent, Francis, duke of Guise and Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, Mary Stuart's uncles, held considerable influence at court. A group of Huguenot nobles conspired to kidnap Francis II in hopes of removing him from the tutelage of the Roman Catholic Guise brothers. On March 17, 1560, the band of nobles attempted a siege of the king's château at Amboise, but a forewarned Guise family easily defeated the Huguenots. Their leader, Seigneur de La Renaudie, was drawn and quartered, and his flesh displayed at

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<sup>145</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 47.

the gates of the town. Some of his followers were drowned in the Loire below the Château while others were beheaded or hanged from the château's balconies. Although Huguenot leaders claimed to be “rescuing” the king, the debacle resulted in the deaths of more than a thousand Huguenots. The so-called Tumult of Amboise validated Catholic suspicions of Huguenot treason. From the Catholic mentality, the Huguenots were doubly rebellious; first because they no longer honored God in accordance with the Roman Church, and second because they revolted against the king. Finally, the two treasons became one because, in the consciences of the time, the royal character was also a divine character.<sup>146</sup>

The increasing militancy of the Huguenots made it progressively more difficult for Protestants to compare themselves to the innocent martyrs of the early church. Protestants were forced to go on the defensive following the Tumult of Amboise. Protestant writers resorted to personal attacks on Catholic writers, particularly those at the University of Paris and the Guise family.<sup>147</sup> The renowned Protestant lawyer and writer François Hotman in his *Histoire du Tumulte d'Amboise* accused the Guises of conspiracy, thus setting up the Huguenots as defenders of the crown.<sup>148</sup> Protestant leaders, firmly committed to self-defense, lashed out at popular Catholic champions like the Guise brothers. Catholics retaliated by portraying Protestantism as a source of divisiveness, chaos, and disorder.<sup>149</sup> The death of Francis II in December of 1560 left another young Valois, the ten-year-old Charles IX, as king of France. In the face of a weak monarchy and a growing polarization of the two faiths,

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<sup>146</sup> Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre*, 22-23.

<sup>147</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 71.

<sup>148</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 73.

<sup>149</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 97.

tensions rose to dangerous levels. In an attempt to secure peace, Catherine de Medici, acting on behalf of her son, adopted a conciliatory policy.

Catherine initially sought to reconcile the two religions at the Colloquy of Poissy, a meeting bringing together religious leaders of both faiths in 1561. The meeting failed, but Catherine attempted to calm the unrest in the realm by issuing the Edict of Saint-Germain in January 1562. The Edict of January reaffirmed the privileged position of the Catholic Church, but hoped to promote tolerance by allowing freedom of conscience for Protestants. The Edict refused to permit Huguenots to worship in towns but allowed for private worship. Far from being reconciliatory, the Edict of January infuriated Catholics who rallied behind Francis, duke of Guise.

#### Massacre at Vassy and the Wars of Religion

Despite overtures from the royal family, the ardently Catholic Guise family maintained a bitter hatred for the Huguenot populace. On March 1, 1562, the duke of Guise, traveling to his estates, stopped in the town of Vassy (Vassy) where he came upon a congregation of Huguenots holding a service in a barn. The confrontation escalated until troops under the command of the duke attacked the Huguenot worshipers. The attack killed more than eighty unarmed Huguenots and injured hundreds more. The massacre outraged Huguenots who mobilized under Louis I, Prince of Condé, went on the attack that same year, and ignited the Wars of Religion.

The politically driven wars distinguish themselves from usual forms of religious violence by the relatively low participation of the majority of the populace. Although rooted in religious conflicts, unlike the massacres perpetrated by the common masses, the wars were

largely fought amongst noble families vying for power and control of France. Religious warfare gave provincial governors and military leaders an opportunity to reinforce their clientele and pursue their family's interests.<sup>150</sup> The conflicts on the battlefield reflected hostilities on the local level. Even when the country was officially at peace, skirmishes between Catholics and Huguenots were common, with a series of attacks carried out by both sides. Protestant crowds participated in iconoclasm in the south, and Catholic majorities in Paris attacked Huguenots and their sympathizers.

Anxiety over the wars, coupled with Huguenot occupation of principal cities, led to outbreaks of violence amongst townspeople. In a prelude to the more bloody 1572 massacres, riots took place in Paris and other provincial towns. These massacres were primarily instigated by local religious conflicts that intensified during the instability of the wars. Huguenot forces under Antoine de Bourbon besieged Rouen from May to October in 1562, during which time Antoine suffered a fatal injury leaving his son, Henry de Navarre, to take up the Protestant banner. The Huguenots captured Lyon in April of 1562, occupying the city for a year during which they destroyed most of the city's public buildings, since welfare and education institutions had largely been Catholic establishments.<sup>151</sup> Lyon suffered an economic collapse under the occupation. The Huguenots disrupted trade by expelling traveling friars, which resulted in the exodus of bankers and merchants as well as in a collapse of the printing and publishing center.<sup>152</sup> The following February of 1563, Huguenots were able to capture the town of Orléans killing Francis, duke of Guise in the offensive. The death of the duke intensified the enmity between the Huguenots and the Guise faction who

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<sup>150</sup> Benedict, "The Wars of Religion, 1562-1598," 149.

<sup>151</sup> Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, *Defining the Holy: Sacred space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 278.

<sup>152</sup> Hamilton, *Defining the Holy*, 279.

saw Francis's death as an assassination by Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. Following the capture of Orléans, Catherine de Medici organized the Edict of Amboise on March 19, 1563, ending the first war. Despite this, the fighting continued with only brief intermittent periods of peace for the next eight years. In retaliation for the massacre of Huguenots in 1562, Coligny and his troops pillaged Toulouse in the spring of 1570, causing widespread destruction throughout the south of France. The third war, coupled with staggering sovereign debts, led to Charles IX signing the Peace of Saint-Germain-en-Laye on August 8, 1570.

Although meant to secure peace within France, the Catholic populace loathed the Edict of St. Germain and the decree caused substantial complications for governing bodies that had been prosecuting Huguenots before the Edict. Essentially, the Edict of St. Germain overturned nearly eighteen months of legal decisions; with over 1,100 acts of parlement nullified in Bordeaux alone.<sup>153</sup> The Edict also forgave Huguenots of their crimes, forcing the Parlement of Paris to retract its bounty of 10,000 écus alive or 2,000 écus dead for Admiral Coligny.<sup>154</sup> Beyond pardoning Huguenots, the Edict allowed those that who previously held positions of power to return to their official posts, forcing out some Catholics from coveted positions.<sup>155</sup> The Edict further proclaimed that all property seized from Huguenots should be returned, inevitably leading to violence as Huguenots attempted to regain property now occupied by Catholics. These actions, laid out to help reintegrate Huguenots into society, had serious implications for town councils and further increased tensions between the two sides. The so-called Peace of Saint-Germain resulted in Catholic humiliation and resentment.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 235.

<sup>154</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 233.

<sup>155</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 235.

<sup>156</sup> Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre*, 98.

### Lasting Hostilities: The Cross of Gastines

Although the violence quieted before the bloodshed reached the levels of the 1572 massacres, those cities seeing the most conflict retained bitter divisions and were among the first to participate in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres of 1572. With Huguenots returning home, tensions heightened as the two sides confronted former enemies. A major source of conflict arose from a declaration in the Edict of Saint-Germain that demanded monuments dedicated to the persecution of Protestants be torn down. One such monument was the Cross of Gastine in Paris. Philippe Gastine and his son Richard were arrested in Paris, convicted for holding an illegal Protestant service in their home and executed in 1569.<sup>157</sup> Following their deaths, the Gastine's property was confiscated and torn down and locals erected a stone pyramid, mounted with a large wooden cross at the site to commemorate the Catholic "victory." Following the Edict, Charles IX along with city officials ordered the cross be destroyed. In the face of intense Catholic outcry, the authorities removed the cross under heavy guard in the middle of the night on December 1571, but did not carry out the order to destroy the cross.<sup>158</sup> They instead relocated the cross to the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents. In retaliation for the removal, Catholic mobs sacked three houses belonging to members of the Gastine family, setting off a series of bloody conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in the capital and killing around fifty people. These early confrontations were a sign of greater violence to come. Enraged by memories of armed battles waged in their hometowns and infuriated at pacification measures given to

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<sup>157</sup> Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 79.

<sup>158</sup> Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 79.

Huguenots, the Catholic populace of France was ready for revenge. In less than two years, France would experience the bloodiest religious fighting in its history.

#### IV. ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY MASSACRE

The Peace of Saint-Germain-en-Laye left both confessions dissatisfied but it nevertheless secured a tentative peace within the realm. This "Peace" proved to be short lived as the proposed engagement between the Bourbon prince, Henry de Navarre and the Valois princess, Marguerite stretched relations to the breaking point. The marriage was a condition of the Peace, but remained unpopular on both sides. Catholics, already horrified that a Protestant was a prince of the blood and possible heir to the throne, abhorred the thought of their Catholic princess marrying a heretic. Huguenots likewise remained skeptical at the royal family's overtures at peace. Despite this mutual distrust, plans for the royal marriage continued, with a wedding scheduled for August 18, 1572.

Previous violence had erupted during momentous political and religious events, and the union of the couple would be no exception. The ardently Catholic capital was on edge as Huguenots flooded into the city to celebrate the marriage. The presence of a large number of armed Huguenots, previously declared rebels, increased tensions. The wedding took place as scheduled with little confrontation, but events already set in motion soon destabilized the city.

On August 22, four days after the wedding, an attempt was made on the life of the Huguenot leader, the Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. While the Admiral was returning to his lodgings, Maurevert, an assassin hired by unknown persons, shot Coligny from a house

belonging to the Guise family. The assassination plot proved to be the tipping point that led to the massacre of thousands. Following the botched attempt, both sides went on the alert.

An angry response from Coligny's followers gave rise to the belief of a possible Huguenot uprising in Paris. Rumors spread of an army outside the city gates waiting to seize the royal family and exact revenge. Catholic apologists like the Provins' priest Claude Haton would later claim that the violence carried out against the Protestants was meant to prevent the Huguenots from killing the king and the princes.<sup>159</sup>

Huguenots for their part feared that the long foretold Huguenot massacre was taking place, causing some to abandon the capital. These were the fortunate ones; those who remained confident in the king's proclamations of peace soon faced the wrath of Parisians. In the hours following the assassination attempt, members of the royal family, the Guises, and other Catholic leaders decided upon a plan to eradicate much of the Huguenot leadership. Historians have long debated who ultimately was responsible for the order to kill the leadership, focusing on the motives of the elite rather than the actions of the common masses. Although it is unlikely that we will ever assuredly know what transpired between those responsible for the death of Admiral Coligny, the assassins were undoubtedly motivated more by politics than religious piety.

On the morning of August 24, the feast day of St. Bartholomew the Apostle, the Royal Swiss Guard, under the Guise's command, deployed to "dispatch" of Coligny. A servant of the duke of Guise dragged the Admiral from his bed and brutally murdered him. The guards then killed Charles de Teligny, Coligny's son-in-law, before moving on to exterminate the remaining Huguenot leaders. The royal family carried out a similar

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<sup>159</sup> David Potter, ed. and trans., *The French Wars of Religion: Selected Documents*, (London: Macmillan, 1997), 97.

assassination strike on other Huguenot leaders in the Louvre itself. Marguerite, now queen of Navarre, described details about the murders in the palace, as well as those of the Huguenot leaders lodged at the Faubourg St-Germain, in her memoirs. Although Marguerite managed to protect the lives of a few men employed in her husband's service, she witnessed archers chasing men through the hallways of the Louvre and Huguenots being run through with pikes.<sup>160</sup> Following the murders in the palace, the Royal Guard, either from a direct order or with the tacit permission of the royal family, spread throughout Paris, sought out and killed the remaining Huguenot leaders.

The duke of Guise and other Catholics claimed that the use of the Royal Guard explicitly expressed the king's command to kill all the Huguenots.<sup>161</sup> The Guise brothers called on the former Parisian provost Claude Marcel to help ensure that the capital's militia could be counted on for action against Huguenots. The Guises, Marcel, who still controlled the body of the people, and monks handed out arquebuses, halberds, and breastplates and urged the Parisians to take care of themselves, ignoring royal orders to act quietly.<sup>162</sup> Haton believed that Parisians had to be forewarned of the plot to prevent the Catholic populace from rushing out in arms and attacking their fellow Catholics, mistakenly believing that they were the Huguenots sent to kill them.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, Catholic Parisians were advised secretly of the plot, which "occasioned great joy."<sup>164</sup> This forewarning received by the Catholic populace, although reportedly for self-protection, helps explain how the violence grew so

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<sup>160</sup> Marguerite de Valois, *Memoirs of Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre* (Boston : L. C. Page, 1899), 64-65.

<sup>161</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 20.

<sup>162</sup> Philippe Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night: The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, trans. Patrick O'Brien (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), 144.

<sup>163</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 97.

<sup>164</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 97.

quickly. What started as a targeted removal of Huguenot leaders, quickly turned into a full-blown riot as Catholic mobs vented their anger on the Protestants.

Despite the tolerance granted to Huguenots in the Peace of Saint-Germain, rumors spread that the order to kill had come directly from the king. Catholic members of the civic militia allowed themselves to believe that the king had finally sanctioned the long-hoped-for eradication of all Huguenots.<sup>165</sup> Mobs were able to use the fear of a Huguenot revolt coupled with a belief of royal support to defend their actions during the massacre. Ridding the city of seditious heretics allowed angry Parisians to combine religious righteousness with practical self-survival. With apparent political and ecclesiastical approval, Parisians began a general slaughter of Huguenots within the capital. As the massacre gained momentum in the following days, the original purpose blurred as the violence outgrew and overpowered its authors; system was apparently lost to indiscriminate slaughter.<sup>166</sup>

### Crowd Organization and Goals

While the scale of the violence was considerable, the gangs involved were far from mindless rabble; rather they acted as a thinking unit. The ringing of the bell from the tower of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois signaled the death of Admiral Coligny. The sounding of the tocsin often heralded the beginning of an uprising, and the crowds reacted accordingly. Haton described the ringing of the bell as the signal to take up arms and rush out into the streets and attack the houses where Huguenots lodged, including both residents of the city and visitors.<sup>167</sup> Bands of Catholics blocked off the streets to prevent Huguenots from escaping the

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<sup>165</sup> Benedict, "The Wars of Religion," 156.

<sup>166</sup> Ralph Roeder, *Catherine De Medici and the Lost Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 357.

<sup>167</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 97.

city and vicious gangs rushed throughout the city attacking any Protestants. The Protestant minister Simon Goulart recorded in his *Mémoires de l'état de France sous Charles IX* that the commissioners, militia captains, heads of the city quarters, and district officials went from house to house having been incited by the dukes of Aumale, Guise, and Nevers, calling out "Kill, kill them all; the king commands it."<sup>168</sup>

Catholic mobs were well rehearsed in acts of violence, and knew implicitly what was to be done. The first sign of sectarian troubles gave rise to lists of proscribed Protestants whom authorities regularly rounded up during times of tension. The Huguenots' property was sequestered and their friends investigated as part of a routine ritual enacted by municipal authorities during sectarian incidents.<sup>169</sup> During the massacre, the king ordered district officials to make a list of Huguenots residing in their district with instructions that households were to protect Protestant lodgers. This list was then used to round up and imprison Protestants, in theory for their protection, but in reality more likely resulting in their death.<sup>170</sup> Unofficial lists, often taken from tax rolls, were also commonly made during times of trouble to help identify victims. In expectation of a day of wrath, Catholic fanatics in the municipality had taken a secret census of the town's Huguenots, anticipating an eventual massacre.<sup>171</sup> Such lists made finding and identifying suspect Huguenots easier and helps explain how the murderers managed to kill so many in such a short time span.

Even without a formal list of suspects, Catholic gangs still displayed an ability to act like a cohesive unit. Mobs quickly selected new targets as orders were shouted and repeated

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<sup>168</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 102.

<sup>169</sup> Mark Greengrass, "Hidden Transcripts: Secret Histories and Personal Testimonies of Religious Violence in the French Wars of Religion," in *The Massacre in History*, eds. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 70.

<sup>170</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 21.

<sup>171</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 166.

by hundreds and thousands of mouths, giving structure to the bloody improvisation.<sup>172</sup> These directions often pointed to a hierarchy of Huguenots to be executed. Those involved in previous conflicts, particularly the Cross of Gastines, were at the top of the list. Huguenots whose houses were pillaged in these early riots were among the first non-nobles to be attacked on St. Bartholomew's Day.<sup>173</sup> The widow of Richard Gastine was one of the first murdered. The youngest Gastine brother, Jacques, and his in-laws Nicolas Le Mercier and his wife were also among the first killed.<sup>174</sup> A remembrance by the participants of past infractions enabled the mob to target, systematically hunt down, and kill their enemies.

Once alerted by the ringing bells, Catholics quickly formulated plans to identify those to be attacked, and ways in which fellow participants could recognize each other. The municipality of Paris adorned themselves with white scarves, white handkerchiefs, and white paper crosses.<sup>175</sup> Catholics also wore white armbands and pinned crosses to their hats, so they could be recognized.<sup>176</sup> These symbols allowed for easier identification of participants though those suspected of heresy would need more to convince the mob of their innocence. Without this level of organization, a more haphazard and thus less destructive mass may have formed.

### Defense of the Faith

While organization aided the group's efficiency, the Catholic mob also needed to prescribe to a set of shared goals in order to act like a relatively cohesive unit. These aims

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<sup>172</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 95.

<sup>173</sup> Diefendorf, *The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, 19.

<sup>174</sup> Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 86.

<sup>175</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 95.

<sup>176</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 164-165.

were to uphold Catholicism as the “true” doctrine, to remove the “taint” from Paris, and to institute a form of authority on the Huguenot populace. These goals can be seen more clearly by examining the details of murders that occurred during the massacre.

Religious sentiment was at the heart of the bloodbath; professing a belief in one confession could convey safety, while the other brought death. The killers acted out religious rituals to reinforce the defense of the “true” faith. There was a didactic character to some of the murders; the killers forced their victims to recant their faith or repeat Catholic prayers.<sup>177</sup> When encountering a suspected Protestant, Catholic mobs forced their captives to recite Catholic prayers, either as a witness to their Catholicism, or as evidence that the victim was indeed a Huguenot. Although renouncing Protestantism did not guarantee one’s safety, refusal to do so ensured death. When Madame Briçonnet refused to recant, she was murdered and thrown into the river, and a very pregnant countess shared the same fate.<sup>178</sup> As in previous conflicts, failure to recite such prayers or appropriately kneel before a statue of the Virgin Mary could result in death. “Pray to the Holy Virgin and the saints and you will be saved” was often the demand of the killers.<sup>179</sup> The assailants of Lady d’Yverny stabbed her while she attempted to escape after refusing to pray to the Virgin Mary.

While refutation of Catholicism could bring death, demonstrating proper devotion to Catholic symbols and traditions could provide safe passage. Gangs stopped the Bishop of Senlis, Pierre Chevalier while he searched for his Protestant brother, and asked the bishop to

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<sup>177</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, “Memoirs of the Massacre: Saint Bartholomew’s Day and the Protestant Identity in France,” in *Voices for Toleration in an Age of Persecution*, ed. Vincent P. Carey (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>178</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew’s Night*, 166.

<sup>179</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 98.

cross himself, which being a Catholic, he willing did and thereby secured his freedom.<sup>180</sup>

Undoubtedly, many of those who did escape the slaughter at some point confronted a decision to hide or outright deny their faith so that they could escape with their life. The thirteen- year-old Maximillian de Bethune, future duke of Sully, dressed in his scholar's gown, tucked a missal under his arm and proceeded to school. Catholics stopped the boy three times before he reached the school and each time Sully escaped death by showing the assailants his missal.<sup>181</sup>

The surest way for Huguenots to secure their lives was to recant and attend Mass. Most famously, Henry de Navarre and Henry I, prince of Condé were saved from the initial strike on Huguenot leaders, then recanted and returned to the Mass in the wake of the massacres. The duke of Bouillon agreed to attend Mass, and so escaped death.<sup>182</sup> Less noble Huguenots were also spared by agreeing to attend Mass. The mother of the future Madame de Mornay, Charlotte d'Arbaleste, implored her daughter to go to Mass and to avoid death. Although she refused, opting to flee the city, Charlotte's brothers consented and were spared.<sup>183</sup> The majority of these murders related in some form to a defense of Catholicism by means of specific rites carried out against Huguenots as a way to cleanse Paris of heresy.

### Purification Rites

Many of the murders not only served to defend Catholicism but also to cut out heresy from the heart of France, resulting in the perceived purification of the realm. This theme had

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<sup>180</sup> Charlotte Arbaleste de la Borde, Madame de Mornay, *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, ed. Henriette Elizabeth, Madame de Witt (Paris: La Société de l'Histoire de France, 1868), 59.

<sup>181</sup> Maximillian de Bethune, *Memoire of Maximillian de Bethune, Duke of Sully*, trans., Charlotte Lennox (London: J. Rivington and Sons, 1755), 33-34.

<sup>182</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 104.

<sup>183</sup> De la Borde, *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, 64.

been a frequent topic for the clergy since the beginning of the Reformation. In a sermon from August 1572, shortly before the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Simon Vigor called the Huguenots "*lépreux spirituels*" (spiritual lepers), but told his flock to fear not for "God will strike and exterminate them."<sup>184</sup> Perhaps the most widely reported ritual was the 'baptizing' of Huguenots by blood or water. A group of murderers dipped Gillette Le Mercier naked in the blood of her murdered parents with threats of killing her if she decided to become a Huguenot.<sup>185</sup> More commonly, Catholic crowds baptized Huguenots in the rivers that served as both poignant symbols and convenient mass graves. In his memoirs, *Histoire de ma vie*, nineteen-year-old Jacques Auguste de Thou, son of the First President of the parlement of Paris, described watching Catholic hordes drag corpses to the river and toss the bodies into the water.<sup>186</sup> Not all who came to the river shared in the slaughter; many gathered to watch the spectacle as well as to mock and insult victims they recognized.<sup>187</sup> The rivers had a cathartic effect for the Catholic populace, where they served as Holy Water to "exorcise the demons."<sup>188</sup> As a last insult, the rivers washed the bodies of Huguenots downstream preventing the Protestants from burying their dead, and denying them a final resting place.

Once the mobs had murdered their victims, the purification was still not complete. The places where heretics lived also needed to be cleansed. Angry Catholics burned many homes owned by Huguenots, invoking the traditional purification of all heretics by fire.<sup>189</sup> The crowds also took previous attempts to cleanse the realm of heretical teachings to the

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<sup>184</sup> Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu*, 498-499.

<sup>185</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 166.

<sup>186</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 96-97.

<sup>187</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 100.

<sup>188</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 179.

<sup>189</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 87.

extreme. In previous conflicts, Catholic mobs had displayed a particular resentment for the works of the Reformation, which they routinely burned in a purification rite. The mobs in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre demonstrated this same hatred for scholarly dissent by attacking universities "where French and foreign students were likely to provide the next generation of heretical ministers."<sup>190</sup> A group of killers dragged the bookseller Oudin, a known Protestant, to the Seine with another professor and a pastor of Spanish origin.<sup>191</sup> Crowds broke into shops, burned books and roasted the bookbinder Spire Niquet alive over a fire of his books in front of his shop.<sup>192</sup> Joachim Opser, a monk studying at the Jesuit college of Clermont in Paris, writing to his Abbot in Switzerland exclaimed how "all of the heretic booksellers who have been caught have been massacred and thrown naked into the waters."<sup>193</sup>

### Authority

Crowds who carried out these monstrous acts often did so with a perverted sense of justice, deemed necessary when authorities neglected to act. In the face of continual concessions from the crown, Catholic preachers had implicitly encouraged these ideas for years. The fiery priest, Simon Vigor implied that justice could be carried out without the direct approval of authorities in a sermon preached in March of 1572 in which he told of how St. Augustine had convicted a man to be executed without the authority of the prince.<sup>194</sup> The crowds involved certainly believed they had not only a legitimate right, but also an obligation

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<sup>190</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 113.

<sup>191</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 113.

<sup>192</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 113.

<sup>193</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 133.

<sup>194</sup> Arlette Jouanna et al., *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998), 1362.

to carry out death sentences on the seditious Huguenots. Many of the murderers assumed the clerical roles of priests and purifiers and magisterial roles of judges and executioners.<sup>195</sup>

Rather than killing indiscriminately, mobs carried out mock trials, where individual victims were tried and convicted of their heresy, even posthumously. Accounts of victims' tongues being split or cut out followed rites dated to the 1530s in which those convicted of heresy had their tongues pierced.<sup>196</sup> Famously, the youths that dragged the body of Coligny through the streets reportedly conducted a post-mortem trial as if "they were judges and officers of the court."<sup>197</sup> Coligny's body was then burned, the traditional punishment for heretics, and dumped in the Seine, after which the killers dragged his body to the gallows at Montfauçon where it was hung up by his heels in accordance to the earlier death sentence handed down by the Paris Parlement.<sup>198</sup>

### Brutalization

Reenactments of religious and judicial rites explain some of the brutality exhibited during the massacres, but the routine dehumanization of Huguenots allowed murderers to carry out barbaric acts with little show of compassion. The brutality described during the Parisian Massacre followed the same patterns of behavior that had been previously seen in religious disturbances. Huguenots not only had to be killed, they had to be humiliated, dishonored, and shamed as the inhuman beasts they were perceived to be.<sup>199</sup> The demonization of Huguenots by Catholics also helps explain the grotesque mutilation of

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<sup>195</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 87.

<sup>196</sup> Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 14.

<sup>197</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 103, using reports from Claude Haton's *Mémoires* Volume 3.

<sup>198</sup> Henry White, *The massacre of St. Bartholomew* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 411.

<sup>199</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 87.

corpses during the massacres.<sup>200</sup> Catholic youths mutilated Coligny's corpse, cutting off the admiral's head, hands, and genitals before burning the body and throwing it into the Seine.

Françoise Baillet, following the murder of her husband Mathurin Lussault, the queen mother's jeweler, jumped from a window, breaking her legs in the fall. Her assailants then dragged Baillet through the streets by her hair, cut off her wrists to retrieve her gold bracelets and ran her through with a meat-roasting skewer.<sup>201</sup> This recreation of Baillet as an animal was one of many ways in which the murderers dehumanized their victims.<sup>202</sup> By dehumanizing their victims, perpetrators of the violence were able to have, as sociologist Troy Duster termed it, a "guilt-free" massacre.<sup>203</sup>

Demonizing the Protestants also allowed for the slaughter of women and children, one of the most enduring legacies of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Regardless of sex or age, Huguenots posed a threat to Catholic society and were thereby equal hazards in the eyes of the murderers. Although some Catholics spared a few women and children, most suffered the same fate as their husbands and fathers. A cobbler, his wife and their three children died together, and a vicious gang butchered the children of a silk merchant on top of their parents' bodies.<sup>204</sup> Witnessing the murder of their parents so traumatized the two young sons of Richard Gastine that they reportedly cried so much that "blood came out of their noses and mouths."<sup>205</sup> A group of children no older than ten dragged an infant in swaddling clothes through the cobbled streets on a strap.<sup>206</sup> After having made his way to the university,

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<sup>200</sup> Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 37.

<sup>201</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 106.

<sup>202</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 87.

<sup>203</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 181.

<sup>204</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 111-112.

<sup>205</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 102 using reports from Crespin's *Histoire des martyrs*.

<sup>206</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 168.

missal in hand, Béthune, duke of Sully was still not safe and tender age made no difference to those who wished to kill him. In his *Memoire of Maximillian de Béthune, duc de Sully*, Béthune recalled how, after arriving at the college, two priests insisted that he be taken away, saying that the order was to spare not even “infants at the breast.”<sup>207</sup> Béthune was lucky enough to find refuge thanks to the principal of the college, but many other children were not as fortunate.

Women also endured considerable abuse, and pregnant women suffered especially gruesome deaths. Women played prominent roles in the religious observance of the family, supervised the household observance of church fast and feast, and provided for the children’s religious education.<sup>208</sup> These crucial responsibilities made women equal, if not greater, threats to the Catholic community. Women were not only victimized by a sixteenth-century culture of violence against the female sex, but those unlucky enough to be pregnant symbolized a source for new heresy. The pregnant wife of the jeweler Monlouet begged for the life of her eighteen-month old son only to have the murderers throw the child to the ground. She was then run through so that her unborn child could be seen poking out of her womb.<sup>209</sup> The wife of the merchant jeweler, Philippe Le Doux, was in the early stages of labor when the mob broke into her house, stabbed her in the abdomen and threw her from the window where the murderers left the woman and her half-born infant to die in the gutters.<sup>210</sup> Catholic mobs killed on average one woman for every ten murders during the 1572 massacres.<sup>211</sup> Although women had been targeted in earlier disturbances, the number killed

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<sup>207</sup> De Bethune, *Memoire of Maximillian de Béthune*, 34.

<sup>208</sup> Benedict, “Religion and the Sacred,” 130.

<sup>209</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 107.

<sup>210</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 107.

<sup>211</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 173, using reports from Crespin’s *Histoire des martyrs*.

was so disturbing that a decree went out on August 28 - 29 ordering that no more women, especially those who were pregnant, were to be killed.<sup>212</sup>

### Beyond Religion

Although religious hatred instigated much of the slaughter, the motives of the murderers were not solely focused on purifying Paris. Opportunistic Catholics carried out a number of attacks primarily to fulfill personal vendettas. The chaos of the massacre gave some opportunities to dispose of rivals or troublesome relatives. The bookseller Jacques Kerver had his colleague and son-in-law killed.<sup>213</sup> The nephews of the wife of the silk cloth merchant, Pierre Feret, clubbed the man to death.<sup>214</sup> The daughter of the wife of Jean de Coulogne gave up her own mother and then married one of the murderers.<sup>215</sup> The commissary Aubert threw his Huguenot wife into the streets and thanked the mob for making him a widower.<sup>216</sup> Louis de Clermont, seigneur de Bussy d'Amboise, ended a drawn out legal suit over an inheritance by stabbing his cousin, Antoine de Clermont.<sup>217</sup>

One of the most notorious murders of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was the killing of the Calvinist philosopher Peter Ramus. Ramus's modest upbringing and writings in which he argued that logic superseded the teachings of Aristotle provoked scandal in the intellectual world. His views created issue with the Sorbonne's Aristotle disciples, particularly Jacques Carpentier sparking an inexplicable hatred between the two.<sup>218</sup> Once the

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<sup>212</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 172.

<sup>213</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 167.

<sup>214</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 108.

<sup>215</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 167.

<sup>216</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 167.

<sup>217</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 98-99.

<sup>218</sup> Jouanna, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, 1233-1234.

fighting broke out Ramus hid in his cellar, but was personally hunted down by murderers sent by Jacques Carpentier. When Carpentier found him two days later, he took his money, and threw him out the window into the courtyard, where students dragged his body through the streets of Paris.<sup>219</sup> His murder was well received by Catholics; Joachim Opser made sure to mention his death in the letter to his abbot, declaring happily that Ramus lay “naked on the shore, pierced by a number of dagger blows.”<sup>220</sup> While Ramus was the most famous, doubtlessly other “errors” occurred which provided certain Catholic candidates easier access to coveted chairs at the university.<sup>221</sup>

While the violence centered on Huguenots, Catholic mobs also attacked servants and foreigners. Regardless of their faith, servants of Huguenots usually shared their master’s fate.<sup>222</sup> When attackers of the button maker, Bertrand the Elder, forced the man to walk the plank into the Seine, they stabbed his apprentices alongside him.<sup>223</sup> Likewise, another group of murderers forced the maid of the king’s feather maker to share the same death as her mistress by walking the plank.<sup>224</sup> Others Protestants were also in danger of being attacked by mobs as the label of Huguenot was quick to be given to German or Flemish students.<sup>225</sup> Although some foreigners were caught up in the slaughter, the mobs spared most regardless of their confession. International relations often trumped religious passions in such cases.

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<sup>219</sup> Jouanna, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, 1233-1234.

<sup>220</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 133.

<sup>221</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 114.

<sup>222</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 99.

<sup>223</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 99.

<sup>224</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 99.

<sup>225</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 114.

## Makeup of the Murderers

Riots were usually led by the *menu peuple*, made up primarily of an anonymous mob or little groups of unidentified men.<sup>226</sup> Large numbers came from artisan groups and extended upward to encompass merchants, notaries, lawyers, and clerics.<sup>227</sup> Of the twenty leaders of the Orleans riots, three were lawyers, eight were merchants, and the remaining were various other craftsmen.<sup>228</sup> The violence saw a significant participation by more marginalized groups, such as women and teenage boys. Women had participated as wives of Catholic tradesmen by marching in Corpus Christi Day processions as well as taking part in previous religious disturbances.<sup>229</sup> Catholic elders gave free license to youths to participate in the bloodshed with little criticism.<sup>230</sup> It is not surprising to see elders approving of children abusing Huguenots when one realizes that the children of the 1562 massacres grew up to be the adults carrying out murders during the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Young students made up a substantial number of the participants in the Toulouse Massacre of 1572.<sup>231</sup>

Although most of the murderers remain anonymous, some were so exceptionally cruel that they stood out from the crowd. A maker of gold thread addicted to crime, boasted of butchering 400 on that day, even killing the devout Catholic canon of Notre-Dame, church councilor Rouillard, after keeping him prisoner for three days.<sup>232</sup> Captain of the militia,

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<sup>226</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 115.

<sup>227</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 182.

<sup>228</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 182.

<sup>229</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 183.

<sup>230</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 183.

<sup>231</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 183.

<sup>232</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 115-116.

Perou, boasted of slaughtering Huguenots like cattle, 180 by his estimates.<sup>233</sup> Tanchou was called an “elite killer,” killing those imprisoned sometimes up to fifteen a day to make room for newcomers, strangling his victims after securing money or deeds from them.<sup>234</sup> René, the queen mother’s perfumer, was described as thriving on theft, murder, and poisoning, loving crime so much that he would visit the prisons to stab Huguenots.<sup>235</sup> Simon Goulart recounted how René lured a jeweler into his house on the pretense of saving his life then cut his throat and tossed him in the Seine.<sup>236</sup> Mark-Hannibal, comte de Coconas, reportedly ransomed out of his own pocket more than thirty Huguenots, so that he could torture them with little stabs promising to set them free if they abjured, then killed them despite whether they recanted or not.<sup>237</sup>

### Resistance and Humanity

While the stories of torture and murder are the most recorded, the tales of those who helped Huguenots are no less compelling. Those fortunate enough to escape often owed their lives to Catholics who hid them and helped conceal their flight. Captain La Cornière, command of the Swiss Guard in the Louvre, saw many living victims thrown into a mound of the dead and said nothing when these same people left the piles, even protecting and helping some of the more badly wounded.<sup>238</sup> Monsieur de Régnier saved his much-hated neighbor Vezins, a Quercy gentleman, leading him out of Paris, and leaving him his horse, vowing that

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<sup>233</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 116.

<sup>234</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 116-117.

<sup>235</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 117.

<sup>236</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 117.

<sup>237</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 117.

<sup>238</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 125.

he wished to settle their dispute like gentlemen, but until that time “men of honor must share one another’s danger.”<sup>239</sup> The captain of the Scots Guards, allowed Seigneur d’Argenlieu to slip away from the Louvre following a death sentence ordered by the king himself in exchange for his purse, even though he could have easily killed the man and taken his money.<sup>240</sup>

One of the most remarkable stories was the escape of the young Jacques-Nompar de Caumont, Duc de la Force. Men under the command of the Comte de Cocanas cut down Jacques’ father and elder brother, and Jacques fell down yelling, “I am dead.”<sup>241</sup> Jacques remained motionless for several hours until nightfall when a tennis groundskeeper discovered the boy and took pity on his young age.<sup>242</sup> The groundskeeper escorted him to Armand de Gontaut, baron de Biron, a noted soldier who fought against the Huguenots but nonetheless saved Jacques from the massacre. Jacques married de Biron’s daughter a few years later, and went on to become a Marshal of France, a duke and peer of the Realm and lived to ninety-four, dying under King Louis XIV.

Charlotte d’Arbalest’s *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay* recalls a list of people who helped her escape the capital. Charlotte initially found refuge along with forty others at the home of Monsieur de Perreuze, a magistrate in the king’s household.<sup>243</sup> A servant offered to take Charlotte’s three-year-old daughter to her Catholic maternal Grandmother Lady Marie

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<sup>239</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 126-127.

<sup>240</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 124-125.

<sup>241</sup> Jacques Nompar De Caumont, *Mémoires Authentiques De Jacques Nompar De Caumont, Duc de La Force, Marechal de France, et de ses deux fils: les marquis de Montpouillan et de Castelnaute*, ed. Le Marquis de la Grange (Paris: Charpentier, 1843), 133.

<sup>242</sup> De Caumont, *Mémoires Authentiques De Jacques Nompar De Caumont*, 77-78.

<sup>243</sup> De la Borde, *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, 60-62.

Guillard, dame d'Esprunes, where the child remained.<sup>244</sup> Several other Catholics aided in Charlotte's flight. Forced to flee Perreuze's home, Charlotte then found refuge in the home of a Catholic blacksmith married to her mother's chambermaid, and the auditor, Missuer de Voysenon, a staunch Catholic, vouched for Charlotte before she found passage on a ship bound for the independent principality of Sedan.<sup>245</sup>

Even those who participated in the massacres chose to save some from the slaughter. The former provost Claude Marcel advised Thoré, the youngest Montmorency, to leave Paris.<sup>246</sup> Anjou, a gleeful participant in the bloodshed, saved Marshal de Cossé at the bequest of his mistress.<sup>247</sup> Marshal Tavannes, one of those responsible for the strike on the Huguenot leaders, produced a whole list of people he saved and his memoirs helped save his descendants from persecution when Henry of Navarre ascended to the throne.<sup>248</sup> The duke of Nevers tactically saved a group of English nobles, but the duke nevertheless thought it fun to keep them captive for the whole day forcing them to witness the slaughter of their co-religionists and to view Coligny's mutilated corpse.<sup>249</sup> Even the duke of Guise, despite being a devout Catholic, opened his home to women and children including the daughter of Michel de l'Hôpital, and helped them avoid the fury of the populace.<sup>250</sup> Simon Goulart was quick to stress that the duke's motives were less than pure, citing his mercy as a way to divert anger of the events towards the king.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> De la Borde, *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, 62.

<sup>245</sup> De la Borde, *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, 62, 65-66.

<sup>246</sup> Jouanna, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, 1072-1073.

<sup>247</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 124.

<sup>248</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 124.

<sup>249</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 100-101.

<sup>250</sup> Diefendorf, "Memoirs of the Massacre," 52.

<sup>251</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 123.

### Propagation to the Provinces

Following four days of butchery, the royal forces finally succeeded in curbing the violence. The estimates of those killed in Paris vary considerably, but the more probable numbers are between 2,000 and 6,000 killed in the capital.<sup>252</sup> While troops brought the capital under control, conflicting reports from Paris had already set off riots in neighboring cities. Although official communications from the king asked for calm, messengers from Paris were spreading the word that the king desired all Huguenots to be killed. Regardless of the intentions of Charles IX, the violence spread outward from Paris, ending the peace of the previous two years, and thrusting France into its third War of Religion.

Thousands of French Huguenots were mercilessly hunted down and brutally murdered. The cities most active during these massacres shared similar histories. Most of the towns had significant Protestant minorities, which threatened the balance of society and increased the likelihood of a bloody uprising. These cities had also been sights of conflict during the previous Wars of Religion. Rouen, Orléans, Lyon, Meaux, Bourges, Angers, and La Charité had all been taken over by Huguenots during the wars. Toulouse, although never appropriated by Huguenots, had suffered under an unsuccessful siege by Protestant forces. Not surprisingly, given their involvement in the Wars of Religion, many of these cities had also participated heavily in the massacres of 1562. The wounds from these earlier conflicts were only ten years healed when news spread from Paris of the Huguenot massacre. Nearly all were towns in which anti-Protestant sentiment ran high, either among the populace at

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<sup>252</sup> See Philip Benedict, "The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres in the Provinces," *Historical Journal* 21, (June 1978): 220, for the low estimates and Carter Lindberg's, *The European Reformation*, 276 for the high estimates.

large or among the local authorities as a result of the events of the first decade of civil war.<sup>253</sup> Real fears of a Huguenot uprising compounded with a desire for retribution for past ills and left the Catholic populace in these towns ready to join their Parisian compatriots.

As in Paris, previous conflicts acted as preparation for the 1572 massacres. Townspeople knew who the primary victims were to be before they spilled the first drop of blood. Local officials and militias, well-rehearsed in harassing members of the Reformed community, often assisted Catholics. In most of the cities, as in Paris, the local populace was primarily responsible for the violence, acting either alone or with the aid of local authorities. The provincial cities experienced the same ritualistic murders. Women, pregnant women, and children again made up a sizeable portion of the victims.

#### La Charité-sur-Loire (August 24), Saumur (August 28-29), & Angers (August 28-29)

The murderous spirit spread quickly outwards from Paris to the cities surrounding the capital. One of the first to react to news of the massacres in Paris was La Charité followed by Saumur and Angers. These towns had a significantly smaller Protestant community than in the neighboring cities.<sup>254</sup> Despite these lower numbers and consequently less threatening Huguenot population, these towns still had a bitter past with the Reformed Church. La Charité had controversially been granted to the Huguenots as a fortified safe haven by the Peace of Saint-Germain and had suffered an eight-month siege by Catholic forces. Protestant minorities had taken both Angers and La Charité during the war.<sup>255</sup> The municipalities of these towns, though less involved than the brutal Parisian masses, were not

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<sup>253</sup> Philip Benedict, "The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres in the Provinces," *Historical Journal* 21, (June 1978): 220, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2638258?> (accessed Mar. 10, 2010).

<sup>254</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 221.

<sup>255</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 222.

inclined to protect Huguenots given past history. As a result, a few zealous Catholics in positions of authority were able to carry out the murders of the Huguenots without fear of angering the populace.<sup>256</sup>

La Charité was under the control of the duke of Nevers, who had gleefully participated in the killing of the top Huguenot leaders in Paris. The primary assailants in the massacre at La Charité were the Italian troops of the duke.<sup>257</sup> In Saumur and Angers, Monsoreau, deputy to the provincial governor Puygaillard, carried out similar small massacres. Monsoreau, with letters from Puygaillard ordering him in the name of the king and the duke of Anjou to execute the Huguenots in the province, instructed the Catholics in Saumur before arriving in Angers.<sup>258</sup> Monsoreau traveled to the house of seigneur de Barbee, one of the prince of Condé's chief lieutenants, where he slew Barbee's brother.<sup>259</sup> Monsoreau subsequently killed a Reformed pastor, and then proceeded to dispatch several other leading Protestants in a similar fashion.<sup>260</sup> Once word of Monsoreau's actions spread to the Catholic populace of the city a crowd soon joined in the violence.<sup>261</sup>

The limited scope of these massacres resulted in less brutality than seen in the larger more heavily populated cities. Nevertheless, the massacres in Saumur and Angers followed similar patterns of behavior. Small groups of soldiers or municipal officials started the killings often acting in a "quasi-judicial manner."<sup>262</sup> These bands, led by Monsoreau, knew whom the main targets were beforehand and acted under the authority of the king and their

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<sup>256</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 221.

<sup>257</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

<sup>258</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

<sup>259</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

<sup>260</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

<sup>261</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

<sup>262</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 223.

duke. These small massacres took on a larger and more violent incarnation in larger cities where news of the massacre quickly spread.

### Meaux (August 25-26)

Meaux was a town that had seen its share of troubles in the previous years. The “Surprise of Meaux,” an attempt by the prince of Condé, Louis I de Bourbon to capture the king in 1567, had sparked the Second War of Religion. The day following the attempt, Protestant mobs massacred some twenty-four Catholic clergy members in what became known as the Michelade. The events of those years were still fresh in the minds of city residents. The town’s procurator, Cosset, hearing the news of the massacres from Paris, immediately had some 200 Huguenots arrested. On Tuesday morning, Cosset began to read a roll call of the Protestant prisoners from atop the prison staircase, and then proceeded to have each man killed.<sup>263</sup> The following evenings, after getting drunk, the men amused themselves by stabbing the remaining victims or clubbing them with cleavers before tumbling them down the steps. Thus in batches of twenty-five to thirty, 200 Huguenots were dispatched in a few days.<sup>264</sup>

As in Paris, the condemned were easily identified from previous participation in conflicts, but unlike in the capital, the quick disposal of Huguenots by the procurator only left a few stray Huguenots to be attacked by the townspeople. Although the involvement of the populace was limited, they did carry out the same sorts of violence seen in the Parisian

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<sup>263</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew’s Night*, 184.

<sup>264</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 139.

massacre, including taking the opportunity to dispose of the unpopular tax collector despite the fact that he was Catholic.<sup>265</sup>

### Orléans (August 25)

News of the bloodshed traveled quickly and reached Orléans, where memories of Condé's siege and capture of the city in 1562 fanned religious tensions. Although the city's provost had reportedly received letters from Paris containing orders to exterminate the Huguenots, he remained skeptical, as Charles IX had sent him to maintain peace, and chose instead to send riders out to gain the truth.<sup>266</sup> While the provost took measures to secure the city by sending out guards to patrol the streets, the Catholic populace became increasingly inflamed by news of the massacre in Paris.<sup>267</sup> An account from the German student, Johann-Wilhelm Von Botzheim, studying in Orléans, captured the predominate feelings of fear and tension, recalling how "one could feel from moment to moment the outbreak of violence approaching."<sup>268</sup>

In the same fashion as Simon Vigor, the rhetoric of the king's preacher and confessor Arnaud Sorbin encouraged the people to use violent means to dispose of the heretics. Bishop Sorbin, reportedly with orders from the king, exhorted his flock to proceed with the slaughter.<sup>269</sup> Von Botzheim, upon hearing of the death of a fellow German, requested protection from the provost. Although the provost did not want Huguenots to be treated with such cruelty, the captains and the people forced him to submit, as they threatened to cut off

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<sup>265</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 184.

<sup>266</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 117-118.

<sup>267</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 118.

<sup>268</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 119.

<sup>269</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 184.

his head if he refused to order the Huguenots to be strangled without exception.<sup>270</sup>

Nevertheless, the provost's moderate attitude caused the city to turn on him forcing him to retreat to the citadel until the king's lieutenant governor for the region, Marshal Cossé, arrived.<sup>271</sup> With law and order suspended for three days the populace freely murdered and pillaged.

Von Botzheim recounted how the papists first satisfied themselves with pillaging and extortion, but once the villains had extorted everything from their victims, leaving them nothing left but their lives, the murderers then took their lives as well.<sup>272</sup> The massacre occurred in the same manner as in Paris, headed by an angry mob led by a few captains who took part in the slaughter and looting for a week.<sup>273</sup>

In the same manner as in Paris, the Orléans mob was not without organization. The Catholics searched in the places known to harbor Huguenots, particularly seeking out the elders of the church whose throats they slashed.<sup>274</sup> Ridding the town of its Reformed leadership ensured that the gangs could more easily take care of the rest.<sup>275</sup> Following the Parisian example, they also sought out the city councilors, notables, lawyers, and all men distinguished by authority or intelligence.<sup>276</sup> The mobs viciously attacked the Huguenots, murdering them in the streets and then, as in Paris, throwing their bodies to be purified in the Loire River.<sup>277</sup> The mobs demonstrated the same disregard for life based on age or gender

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<sup>270</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 120.

<sup>271</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 120.

<sup>272</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 119.

<sup>273</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 139.

<sup>274</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 119.

<sup>275</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 119.

<sup>276</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 119.

<sup>277</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 139-140.

with some 150 women murdered.<sup>278</sup> An estimated 1,200 victims perished in the massacres at Orléans.

On Sunday, the churches were filled, as thousands of widows, orphans, and youth who customarily went to Protestant services instead attended Mass.<sup>279</sup> That same Sunday, all the papists were “gay and happy” with the bands at Orléans celebrating the killing by “singing, playing lutes and guitars.”<sup>280</sup> Authorities obliged Huguenots to recant by having them sign a formal abjuration. Those who refused to renounce were reported to be put to death, while children as old as eight were re-baptized and allowed to live.<sup>281</sup> Von Botzheim and his fellow Germans attempted to counsel the widows of Huguenots to do nothing against their conscience, but these women feared they would be put to death, recalling how such events occurred following the massacres in 1562.<sup>282</sup>

#### Troyes (September 4)

Upon hearing the news of the Parisian Massacres, Troyes’s magistrates sent guards to secure the gates and imprison any Huguenots who attempted to leave. The governor of Angoulême, Monsieur de Ruffe, rode by shouting to the guards that it was the king’s will to kill all the Huguenots.<sup>283</sup> An unnamed account from Troyes claimed Monsieur de Ruffe told the guards that there should be no peace, that the king intended that what had occurred in

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<sup>278</sup> White, *The massacre of St. Bartholomew*, 450.

<sup>279</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 120.

<sup>280</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 93.

<sup>281</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 121.

<sup>282</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 121.

<sup>283</sup> Penny Roberts, *A City in Conflict: Troyes During the French Wars of Religion* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 144.

Paris be done everywhere.<sup>284</sup> The Catholic populace had participated in the 1562 massacres, after which many of the Huguenots in Troyes had fled to Geneva and Strasbourg. Tensions in the city again increased as resentment built following the refugees return. Not only did the local community have to make room for the returning Huguenots, but locals also had to listen to those who came back extol the virtues of the cities in which they had taken refuge.<sup>285</sup>

Despite these bitter sentiments and messages calling for action, the city remained under control. The town council received a letter from the king and the region's governor, the duke of Guise, which stressed the need to keep the city calm, but also urged the councilors to prepare for the city's defense and maintain public rest.<sup>286</sup> The duke of Guise, although an integral conspirator in the murder of Admiral Coligny and the attack on the Huguenot leadership, had little desire to see mass rioting in his lands, but the beginnings of the massacre were already underway.

The 1562 violence had prepared city officials for swift action in response to the news. On August 26, the guards confiscated weapons; the magistrates instituted a citywide ban, and prevented any Huguenots from leaving the city.<sup>287</sup> The bishop of Troyes, Monsieur de Bauffremont, frustrated by the lack of action, met with like-minded individuals to assemble the town's *mauvais garçons* in order to kill all the Huguenots.<sup>288</sup> These ruffians assembled that evening, but most left without incident as the town's merchants assembled troops to patrol the streets.<sup>289</sup> Despite attempts to keep the peace, gangs had already begun to kill

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<sup>284</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 122.

<sup>285</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 94.

<sup>286</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 145.

<sup>287</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 144.

<sup>288</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 122.

<sup>289</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 122.

Protestants who dared to venture out during the day. The violence worsened until the mobs began breaking into houses.

In Troyes, the list of the condemned started with those whose families either had been exiled during the 1562 massacres or had relatives killed in the earlier conflict.<sup>290</sup> Although Catholic mobs took to the streets, the townspeople participated in a more minor capacity than in the previous massacre, mostly pillaging the homes of killed Huguenots and killing a handful of those that could be found.<sup>291</sup>

The lists of those murdered although not as complete as those in Paris, showed that like their compatriots in the capital, motivations were sometimes for other than religious reasons. Vengeance was largely responsible for the death of the pewterer, Pierre Blancpignon, who knew his death was at hand upon seeing his enemy, Jean Despine, whom he had previously had arrested for theft, at his door.<sup>292</sup> The assailants ran Blancpignon through and pillaged his house until authorities sent out a guard to stop the looting.<sup>293</sup> Records of some of the Huguenots killed in the violence showed that there was little concern for class as evidenced by large numbers of merchants and artisans murdered, while listing no elites or nobles.<sup>294</sup> Despite this, the hope of enhancing one's personal wealth acted as motivation for some of the killers. A gang assembled under Captain Villiers went as far as fifteen leagues outside of Troyes, scouring to find any Protestant to kill, but also attacking papists whom he forced to pay ransom for their lives.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 150-151.

<sup>291</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 144.

<sup>292</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 123.

<sup>293</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 123.

<sup>294</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 125.

<sup>295</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 123.

Although townspeople killed those Huguenots they were able to locate, the town's *bailli*, Anne Vaudrey, seigneur de Saint-Phal and a veteran of the 1562 massacre, ordered the majority of the murders. Despite a decree calling for peace issued on August 28, *Bailli* Vaudrey had the Huguenots rounded up and imprisoned on the 30th.<sup>296</sup> During the first week, guards filled the prison, and then on September 3 a messenger came claiming that, despite orders to release the prisoners, all the Huguenots were to be slaughtered.<sup>297</sup> Although several of the city's councilors appeared horrified, they did nothing, choosing instead to withdraw and leave the *bailli* to carry out orders.<sup>298</sup> The town's hangman refused to do the task so Sergeant Pernet, another conspirator of the 1562 massacre, executed the order to kill the Huguenots.<sup>299</sup> Once the Huguenots were imprisoned, Pernet along with ten guards pulled from the civic militia, most of whom had a history of attacks on Protestants, murdered the prisoners starting on September 4.<sup>300</sup> The guards mercilessly carried out the executions, including the killing of two Catholics also imprisoned.<sup>301</sup> Like incidents in Paris, those who did not gleefully participate could be singled out. In this manner, Pernet struck down Jean Le Jeune, a solicitor called to read the names of those condemned, for asking the sergeant to show mercy; hence the first person killed at the prison was a Catholic, not a member of the Reformed faith.<sup>302</sup> Following the murder of the Huguenots at the prison, Vaudrey published the August 28 order calling for peace on September 5.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 145.

<sup>297</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 139.

<sup>298</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 124.

<sup>299</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 139.

<sup>300</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 147-148.

<sup>301</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 144.

<sup>302</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 124.

<sup>303</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 186.

### Lyon (August 31-September 2)

Following the massacre in Paris the Messieurs de Rubys and de Masso, natives of Lyon, rode in from Paris and reported that the king wanted the crowds to carry out the same violence in Lyon as in Paris.<sup>304</sup> The news spread through the city and caused the Catholic community to become restless. Protestant forces had taken over Lyon ten years before, and bitterness remained between members of the two faiths.

Despite the discontent, Hants Rotze, the Swiss captain at the Lyon garrison, reported that the mayor had ordered all Huguenots to stay home and to turn over their weapons, and ordered that no Catholics molest them or their goods, citing orders from the king dated the day of the Parisian Massacre instructing the mayor to keep the edict of pacification.<sup>305</sup> Governor Mandelot had the gates closed and ordered guards to patrol the streets. Although attacks began on the 27th, they did not become widespread. Governor Mandelot then ordered the Huguenots to come to his home, where they were then arrested and imprisoned for their safety. Authorities rounded up the remaining Huguenots and sent them to various monasteries, such as the Roanne prison and the archbishop's palace. When the Governor left to investigate a rebellion, armed bands gathered on Sunday the 31<sup>st</sup> and invaded the prisons killing seven or eight hundred, including the famous composer Claude Goudimel.<sup>306</sup>

As in Paris, the Lyon Massacre displayed similar goals of bolstering the rightful place of Catholicism and appropriating authority. Although the rabble killed at least seven hundred in the prisons, Captain Hants Rotze recorded that they freed some former Huguenots who

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<sup>304</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 182.

<sup>305</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 182.

<sup>306</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 183.

agreed to convert to the Catholic religion.<sup>307</sup> Once Huguenots denounced their “heretical” faith, the killers allowed them to live as they no longer threatened the soul of France with tainted beliefs. The crowds in Lyon also exhibited signs that they believed they acted as just executioners in the massacre. The municipality originally tried to get the Lyon hangman to carry out the “sentences” of the Huguenot, but his response was, “I am no assassin: I work only as justice commands me.”<sup>308</sup> His reaction, like that of the Troyes executioner, was not singular as hangmen largely refused to take part in the murders.<sup>309</sup> While the townspeople may have felt justified in their actions, the official executors of such sentences did not see the killings as legitimate in the eyes of the law.

The killing and looting in Lyon lasted for several more days before subsiding and moving on to the next town. Like in Paris, the rivers served as the congregating point for the murderers. In response to a flood of the Rhone in 1570, Catholics declared, “the water had wished to purge the filth” which the Huguenots had spread.<sup>310</sup> The Rhone served as a place to wash away the sins of the enemy; the living and the dead were dumped into the river, which carried bodies as far as Provence.<sup>311</sup>

#### Bourges (August 26, September 11)

The previous twenty years showed the city of Bourges to be in many ways similar to the other large cities where massacres took place. Bourges too had a sizeable Huguenot community and like many of the other towns had been in the hands of Protestant forces

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<sup>307</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 183.

<sup>308</sup> White, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew*, 449.

<sup>309</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 190.

<sup>310</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon,” *Past & Present* 90, (February 1981): 55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650716> (accessed Feb.10, 2010).

<sup>311</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 141.

following the outbreak of the First War of Religion. The city had participated in the 1562 massacres, allowing Catholics to regain control of the town, after which the two confessions lived an uneasy coexistence. After a local official returned from Paris, bringing news that the king desired to exterminate all the Huguenots, the town militia and the Catholic mobs were ready for violence.<sup>312</sup> The notable French lawyer and author, François Hotman, described the scene in his hometown. Hotman recalled how, once the murdering began, the papists killed all they could find, even killing a man for little more than having been present at the recent defeat of Genlis.<sup>313</sup> Hotman managed to escape dressed in his professorial robes and a doctor's bonnet while his colleague Hugues Doneau escaped under the guise of a German student since Germans, although they lost their property, were largely immune from personal attack as Lutherans.<sup>314</sup>

Although murders were taking place throughout Bourges, town officials kept order throughout most of the city, unsure of how to act in the face of conflicting reports. Town authorities waited for a more definitive directive until the messenger Mareuil announced that the king's orders to kill Protestants were secret and thereby different from the official transmission.<sup>315</sup> With this new information, authorities again rounded up and imprisoned Huguenots on September 11. The prisoners were then brought forward, systematically murdered and thrown into ditches.

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<sup>312</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 216.

<sup>313</sup> Donald R. Kelley, *François Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 217-218.

<sup>314</sup> Kelley, *François Hotman*, 217-218.

<sup>315</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 140.

Following the massacres in Bourges the violence died down in the provinces as word spread that the king desired to keep the peace. This brief interlude in fighting was short lived as angry townspeople throughout France called for actions similar to those in Paris.

#### Rouen (September 17-20)

A Huguenot minority had taken control of Rouen, just as in Orléans, Lyons, Meaux and Bourges and the inhabitants like those in other towns were eager to exact revenge on the Protestant population. An anonymous author described the Huguenot “vipers” taking over the city in 1562, which provoked a siege culminating with the recapture of the city and a disastrous sack, the result of which was “calamitous poverty.”<sup>316</sup> Despite the fighting, a sizeable minority of Huguenots continued to practice in Rouen fueling hatred between the two groups.

Although Rouen’s governor, Carrouges, was a moderate Catholic, these large numbers of Protestants kept the city on edge with a previous riot occurring in March of 1572 only months before the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.<sup>317</sup> Authorities rounded up the Huguenots as a precautionary measure and imprisoned them for their own safety at the request of the king.<sup>318</sup> The governor and town council maintained order until mid-September.

On September 17, with the governor out of town, Catholics seized control of the town, locked the gates, and began a rampage of killing that lasted four days.<sup>319</sup> The vicar of St. Pierre, Claude Montereul and Captain Laurent de Maromme seized an opportunity on

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<sup>316</sup> Benedict, “Massacres in the Provinces,” 220.

<sup>317</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew’s Night*, 185.

<sup>318</sup> Benedict, “Massacres in the Provinces,” 210.

<sup>319</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 93-94.

September 18 to lead an angry mob to the prison where they broke in, killed some sixty Protestants and then carried the violence throughout the streets.<sup>320</sup> As in Paris and other cities during the massacres, crowds broke into the prison executed a carefully drawn up list of their victims.<sup>321</sup> When the bloodshed subsided, the faceless mob had killed 300 to 400 people in the prisons and on the streets of Rouen.

### Bordeaux (October 2-3)

Bordeaux, unlike most of the neighboring cities, was never seized by Protestant forces and would thus seem to harbor less hostility towards its Reformed community, but this was not the case. While never taken over by a Huguenot minority, anti-Protestant feelings ran high in Bordeaux since it was a Catholic stronghold in a heavily Calvinist region.<sup>322</sup> In Bordeaux, word of the Parisian Massacre arrived on August 29 along with royal letters ordering all provincial governors to protect the Huguenots.<sup>323</sup>

Although Bordeaux remained calm after the massacres following the king's orders for peace, the preaching of Bordeaux's powerful priest incited strong anti-Huguenot sentiments. On Michaelmas, September 29, Father Edmond Auger, a popular Jesuit priest, announced that the Parisian Massacre had taken place at the archangel's command.<sup>324</sup> The sermon recalled how the angel of God had executed the Lord's judgments already in Paris and Orleans; following the sermon, the Catholic populace went on a bloody rampage.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 141-142.

<sup>321</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 185-186.

<sup>322</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 221.

<sup>323</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 213.

<sup>324</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 189.

<sup>325</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 163 using reports from Crespin's *Histoire des martyrs*.

Despite the clergy setting off rounds of rioting, the majority of the killings did not occur until some days later. The Catholic municipality only participated in a few murders but their loathing of the Protestants helped encourage the local governor to exterminate the Huguenots. Soldiers under the command of Catholic zealot Governor Montferrand almost exclusively carried out the massacre that took place.<sup>326</sup> As in Paris, members of the *Bande Cardinale* of Bordeaux wore a red bonnet to recognize their co-conspirators.<sup>327</sup> On October 2-3, Montferrand ordered forty leading Huguenots to be executed and then proceeded to let his gangs loose in the city where they killed some eighty in the streets before massacring another 264 prisoners.<sup>328</sup>

#### Toulouse (October 3-4)

Toulouse, Like Bordeaux, was never officially taken over by Huguenot forces, but the Protestants of Toulouse came close, only being beaten back after five days of bitter street fighting in 1562.<sup>329</sup> Despite this violent past, Toulouse continued to support a large Huguenot minority.

Upon hearing of the Parisian Massacre, the magistrates in Toulouse struggled to maintain calm while sending out messengers to get a confirmed report from the king. In Toulouse, both the provincial parlement and the city magistrates tried to maintain order by imprisoning the Huguenots. Toulouse remained calm until October 3, when the envoys sent off to Paris returned to the city, claiming that the king wished the Huguenots killed.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 94.

<sup>327</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 184.

<sup>328</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 189.

<sup>329</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 221.

<sup>330</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 217.

On October 3, Delpech, a wealthy merchant recently returned to Toulouse, led a group of armed citizens and killed 200.<sup>331</sup> In Toulouse, the mob was crucial in sparking the violence, which was accompanied by a good deal of pillage.<sup>332</sup> On October 3, Catholics stormed the prison and murdered the Huguenots including three judges from the parlements, one of whom was the reformed jurist Jean de Coras.<sup>333</sup>

As in the previous massacres, victims of Toulouse also suffered from personal vendettas that played a role in bringing about their demise. Latour murdered the Catholic priest Guestret, a man with whom he was entangled in a lawsuit.<sup>334</sup> Coras, an advisor to the Parlement of Toulouse, had the misfortune to suffer the ills of being not only hated for his position, but also despised for returning to his position in the parlement following the Peace of St. Germain. Coras, like other prominent victims of the 1572 massacre, had only narrowly escaped death when the fighting broke out as the Huguenots tried to take Toulouse in 1562.<sup>335</sup> His past made him a particularly appealing target for his Catholic rivals, who carried out their own ritual of degradation by hanging Coras along with two colleagues in their red ceremonial robes in front of the Palace.<sup>336</sup>

Toulouse was the last substantial incident of violence that occurred as a result of the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The parlement of Toulouse sent orders telling the surrounding towns of the message to kill the Huguenots, which provoked smaller outbreaks of killings in the towns of Gaillac, Gaches, and Albi.<sup>337</sup> After these riots subsided in the first

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<sup>331</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 189.

<sup>332</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 221.

<sup>333</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 93.

<sup>334</sup> White, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew*, 454.

<sup>335</sup> Jouanna, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, 823.

<sup>336</sup> Jouanna, *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion*, 823.

<sup>337</sup> Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 217.

week of October, other cities were brought under control as the king made it clear that no more Huguenots were to be killed.

### Provinces that Resisted

While the Catholic populace of many large French cities did incite murderous violence, other individual towns and provinces avoided the bloodshed. Strong provincial leadership that chose to remain calm in the face of conflicting reports largely maintained the peace in these cities. Gourdes, governor of the Dauphine, St. Herem in Auvergne, and the duke of Longueville, governor of Picardy, scrupulously kept order in their cities.<sup>338</sup> Large numbers of Protestants in the Dauphine region made Governor Gordes cautious, and he declined to believe the king's purported murderous intentions.<sup>339</sup> Governor Sigogne at Dieppe saved the Protestants by refusing to allow for murder, but obliged the Huguenots to abjure their religion.<sup>340</sup> Comté de Tende, the governor of Provence, flatly refused to carry out orders to kill the Huguenots. Tende stated that the secret orders could surely not be the king's and were therefore suspect of royal usurpery. Comté de Tende went on to note that the second letters were so cruel that he would choose to ignore them even if the king had issued them.<sup>341</sup>

In some areas, local councils and private individuals took it upon themselves to maintain peace and protect the Huguenots in their city. In Nantes, the local alderman succeeded in compelling the town to spare the Huguenots, and the town council in Limoges

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<sup>338</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 142.

<sup>339</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 188.

<sup>340</sup> Erlanger, *St. Bartholomew's Night*, 186.

<sup>341</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 144.

did the same.<sup>342</sup> The Archbishop Grimaldi of Vienne protected and sheltered some Huguenots, thereby displaying humanity towards the heretics.<sup>343</sup>

Sadly, most stories of humanity are forgotten in the face of such tremendous bloodshed. Though concrete numbers do not exist, the numbers of people killed in violence range from as little as 5,000 up to 20,000.<sup>344</sup> The violent uprising left a deep scar across France, sparking the Fourth War of Religion and leaving a lasting impact on Huguenot communities.

### Reaction to the Massacres

Much of the Catholic population heralded the massacres with joy and celebration. Catholics used divine signs to reinforce the image that they had justifiably fulfilled God's will. In the wake of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, stories arose claiming that a barren hawthorn tree in the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris had begun to bloom at the beginning of the massacre.<sup>345</sup> At the same time that Catholics flocked to pray at the blooming tree, a new star reportedly appeared in the sky.<sup>346</sup> Claude Haton connected the events of the Parisian Massacre to the removal of the Cross of Gastines. Haton, in reference to the white paper crosses Catholics pinned to their hats during the rioting, remarked that by God's grace where one cross had been torn down thousands should spring up.<sup>347</sup> Haton also exalted divine intervention on behalf of the Catholics during the violence claiming that the massacre had

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<sup>342</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 143.

<sup>343</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 143.

<sup>344</sup> See Benedict, "Massacres in the Provinces," 207 for the low estimate and Carter Lindberg's, *The European Reformations*, 276 for the high.

<sup>345</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 168, from Haton's *Mémoires*.

<sup>346</sup> Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, 132.

<sup>347</sup> Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 106, from Claude Haton's *Mémoires* Volume 2.

occurred “without any wound and without a single drop of Catholic blood being spilled,” which the priest could only attribute “to the powerful hand of God and as a singular miracle.”<sup>348</sup>

The terrible death toll, though not lost on Catholic apologists, nevertheless was seen as a glorious act in a righteous war. The monk, Joachim Opser, studying at the Jesuit college of Clermont in Paris, reported details of the massacre back to his Abbot in Saint-Gall in Switzerland. Opser proclaimed that he “shuddered at the sight of the river full of naked and mutilated cadavers” but went on to praise “the prudence and magnanimity of the king, who, after having by his goodness and indulgence fattened up, so to speak, the heretics like cattle, suddenly had their throats slit by his soldiers.”<sup>349</sup>

A letter from the Venetian Senate to their ambassadors in France expressed equal praise for the slaughter of the Huguenots and the actions of the king. The Senate implored the ambassador to convey to Charles IX how the massacres had caused them “such joy as can be rightly born of something that has brought such notable benefits to Christianity” and that Charles had most assuredly earned his title, “Most Christian” king.<sup>350</sup>

Protestant states undoubtedly felt differently and the Huguenot printers quickly began publishing works denouncing the massacre. A propaganda piece entitled *The Wake-Up Call for the French and Their Neighbors* (1574), criticized Charles IX, his brothers and the queen mother for watching the slaughtering of Huguenots from the balconies of the Louvre on top of parading out into the streets to view the bodies of those slain.<sup>351</sup> Huguenot propagandists

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<sup>348</sup> Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre*, 27-28.

<sup>349</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 133.

<sup>350</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 135.

<sup>351</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 113.

seized the chance to turn the massacres into a justifiable resistance to the Crown. Most Protestant historians said relatively little about popular participation in the killings, preferring to focus the blame entirely on their political enemies to gain a maximum amount of sympathy, but also political and financial support from abroad.<sup>352</sup> The Protestants reached out to Protestant leaders in the Netherlands, Calvin's Swiss Cantons and England, where Queen Elizabeth reportedly dressed her assembly in mourning attire for the reception of the French ambassador following the violence. This resistance led to many more years of war between the two sides, but the Protestant community in France would never recover from the devastating effects of the massacres.

### Lasting Effects

In the days and months that followed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, a rapid change took place within the Reformed faith. The original conspiracy against the Huguenots succeeded in eliminating many of the leaders from the most prominent families of the Reformed Church. Henry de Navarre and his cousin, Henry I, prince of Condé, were compelled to convert to Catholicism during their imprisonment in Paris. Although they later recanted, the two were held in Paris for nearly four years limiting their involvement in the Huguenot cause. The massacres dispersed the remaining Huguenot leaders as many fled in their wake.

While Huguenot political leadership struggled to regain control, the religion saw a drastic drop in the numbers of Huguenots willing to continue to suffer for their faith. Fewer and fewer French Protestants turned towards the cult of martyrdom that had strengthened

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<sup>352</sup> Diefendorf, "Memoirs of the Massacre," 54.

their resolve in the previous decades. Although fighting continued at the aristocratic level for many more years, massive waves defected from the Protestant cause and thousands fled abroad.<sup>353</sup> Many fled to Huguenot strongholds in France while others choose to leave the country, fleeing to London, Strasbourg, and Geneva. François Hotman, after escaping Brouges, walked for five weeks before arriving in Geneva.<sup>354</sup> Those that were unable to flee, or who chose to stay, faced mounting pressure to recant.

Pastor Nicolas Pithou, in Troyes, remarked how so many of those who had previously professed the Protestant religion quickly returned to Mass, some out of fear but others attended on their own accord.<sup>355</sup> Within a week of the massacre at Troyes, the clerics elected a special confessor to hear the recantations of Huguenots. After confessing their sins, the priest absolved the former Protestants of their excommunications and presented them with a certificate of their good standing with the church to be registered with the magistrates.<sup>356</sup> Pithou remarked that former Protestants flocked to him in troops as if to a remedy or protection so much that he had to be given an assistant.<sup>357</sup> Even after the regional governor, Barbesieux, declared all Huguenots were not to be harmed by royal decree and offered them his protection, the Huguenots of Troyes instead asked the Governor to escort them so that they might safely return to Mass.<sup>358</sup> Pithou described how within a matter of months, Huguenots re-embraced orthodoxy and increasing numbers slipped back into Catholic practices.<sup>359</sup> With the fallout of the massacres, Pithou claimed that only twenty Huguenot

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<sup>353</sup> Benedict, "Religion and the Sacred," 157.

<sup>354</sup> Kelley, *François Hotman*, 217-218.

<sup>355</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 129.

<sup>356</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 129.

<sup>357</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 129-130.

<sup>358</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 155.

<sup>359</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 93.

families remained.<sup>360</sup> In Rouen, a Huguenot congregation of about 16,500 before the bloodshed dwindled to a mere 3,000 afterwards.<sup>361</sup> For many who returned to Catholicism the massacres evidenced that their spiritual family was no longer strong enough to protect them in the face of intense persecution.

Baptismal records of the time also reported large numbers of children re-baptized into the Catholic Church. In Troyes, several of the children baptized in the days following the slaughter were children of the men killed in the prisons.<sup>362</sup> Using baptismal records, historian Philip Benedict calculated that a minimum of 288 Huguenot children, belonging to 191 different families, were re-baptized in the fifteen parishes of Rouen and these numbers are probably closer to 337 and 240, respectively.<sup>363</sup> Records continue to show large numbers of baptisms in the weeks and months following the massacres. In Troyes, two thirds of all baptisms came after the restoration of order. The fact that these baptisms took place after the immediate threat of death had passed suggests that some Huguenots were motivated “by a judgment that it was simply impossible to continue living as a Huguenot among a hostile Catholic majority,” or that they interpreted the massacre as a “providential warning from heaven.”<sup>364</sup>

Records of recantations combined with personal accounts show a considerable number of those who converted to Catholicism apparently suffered from a real crisis of faith following the massacres. The Huguenot minister Hugues Sureau Du Rosier renounced

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<sup>360</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 129.

<sup>361</sup> Philip Benedict, *Rouen During the French Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 128-138.

<sup>362</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 154.

<sup>363</sup> Philip Benedict, “Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Rouen: The Demographic Effects of the Religious Wars,” *French Historical Studies* 9, No. 2 (Autumn 1975), 228, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/286126> (accessed Apr. 7, 2010).

<sup>364</sup> Benedict, “Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Rouen,” 228.

Protestantism after the massacres and served the Catholic clergy by bringing other Huguenots back to the faith. In 1574, Du Rosier reconverted back to Protestantism and described why he had strayed in a confession to the Genevan Church. His confession showed how, under the stress of imprisonment, he began to doubt his conversion from Catholicism. Du Rosier recounted how he saw the massacres as evidence of God's indignation, believing that God detested the Reformed Faith and condemned them by striking at the Huguenots repeatedly, "as if he wished to ruin this church and favor instead the Roman one."<sup>365</sup> Du Rosier likely voiced sentiments felt by many Huguenots in the wake of the killings and helped account for the large numbers that recanted in the following years.

Those that remained faithful to the Reformed Church suffered further abuses. Following the massacres of 1572, those of the Reformed faith experienced a sharp decline in status and wealth.<sup>366</sup> Many households were left without male heads, restricting opportunities for those families who saw further declines. With few cities left with sizeable congregations, Huguenot minorities were in no position to advance their cause. Even with peace restored, and Huguenots again free to practice, their numbers did not return to pre-massacre levels. Following the Edict of Pacification, the Protestant preacher, Jean Chassanion, reported that Troyes lacked sufficient commitment from the Huguenot community to warrant his staying in 1576.<sup>367</sup>

At the end of the Wars of Religion, an estimated one million Huguenots and 700 churches survived, mostly situated in the south with little power in the north.<sup>368</sup> Numbers

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<sup>365</sup> Potter, *The French Wars of Religion*, 131.

<sup>366</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 153.

<sup>367</sup> Roberts, *A City in Conflict*, 70.

<sup>368</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 196.

continued to decline throughout the seventeenth century as many converted back to Catholicism or emigrated.<sup>369</sup> The congregations dwindled until little remained of a once sizeable and active Reformed community.

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<sup>369</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 196.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although the Huguenot community disappeared, a macabre fascination with the events of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre lives to this day. As recently as 1997, Pope John Paul II aroused anger at the pontiff's proposed Sunday Mass at the twelfth annual World Youth Day held in Paris. The celebration's date, August 24 was the 425th anniversary of the Parisian Massacre. More than 400 years after the bloodshed, the massacre continued to fan passions so much so that Pope John Paul included a reference to the sad events of the massacre during a prayer vigil. In the context of today's society, the gruesome details and sheer magnitude of the butchery in 1572 leaves many questioning what could have led to such a brutal event. Examining the massacre in the context of the sixteenth century rather than from a modern perspective helps to clarify some of the answers to the bloodshed.

Members of a Huguenot party that had made enemies both in the royal family and within the realm met their end on August 24. The mobs that carried out many of the murders had been systematically trained for such an event. Anti-Protestant preachers vehemently spread the hatred, as they had in previous attacks on religious deviants. Catholic polemics hurriedly pointed out the dangers from allowing such heretics to live within the realm. Clerics and ardent Catholics blamed the Huguenots for famines, plagues, and political defeat all rained down upon them by a disapproving God.

The Catholic populace battled not only for the soul of France, but also for undisputed superiority in the country. At the time of the massacres, Huguenots represented a sizeable minority in many of the most prominent French towns, and in the minds of many presented a real threat to Catholic municipalities. Once the Wars of Religion broke out, Protestant forces besieged and captured towns that in turn saw the most bloodshed during the 1572 massacres. Towns held by Protestant forces reigned down abuses on the Catholic populace. Huguenots were not innocent bystanders in these actions; they too participated in violent rioting, looting, and even in the killing of Catholics. Reformation France saw religious, social, and political divisions that “forced even the most uncommitted persons to confront questions of obedience, loyalty and betrayal, dissembling or fleeing, even of life and death.”<sup>370</sup>

The St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre was not unique in its aims; indeed a series of bloody conflicts occurred in 1562, in the same towns that saw violence ten years later. The Massacre is unique for its devastating number of lives lost in less than two months time. Although the numbers are imposing, these massacres were not simply the result of unorganized masses indiscriminately killing. Perhaps more sinisterly, much of the violence was organized, which helped facilitate the slaughter of so many. The actions of conspirators were neither “spontaneous terrorism [n]or anarchy”; the lists of suspects in such matters were carefully drawn up, and were always prepared in advance by agitators.<sup>371</sup> Participants knew each other by word or dress, and could rely on a display of religious piety to Catholic idols if necessary.

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<sup>370</sup> Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*, 323.

<sup>371</sup> Jean Héritier, “The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reason of State and Ideological Conflict,” in *French Wars of Religion: How Important Were Religious Factors?*, ed. J. H. M. Salmon (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1967), 52.

The Reformed religion drove a wedge between communities and turned family members against each other. When the killing began, some loyal friends and family attempted to aid their Huguenot associates, but many other Catholics refused to assist their neighbors and kin. When neighbors barred their doors against the Huguenots, the vicious mobs could easily slaughter them in the streets. In some of the provinces, officials made the task easier by rounding up and imprisoning Huguenots for their protection. Once confined, the Calvinists became helpless victims of a murderous plot.

With the start of the massacre, Catholic gangs carried out gruesome murders and mutilations of men, women, and children. The barbaric nature of the killing also captured public attention in subsequent centuries, but like violence itself, the cruelty displayed was not abnormal for the time. Catholic mobs acted out rites they most likely would have witnessed at the executions of criminals and heretics. The piercing of tongues, the severing of limbs, and beheadings were common enough punishments of the time. Crowds carrying out these tortures on victims of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre were similarly assuming the authority to execute treasonous offenders, which they saw the Huguenots to be. These acts would have been all the easier to perform knowing that Protestants had been dehumanized in word and print since the beginning of the Reformation.

The overarching perception of the time was that these monsters and criminals needed to be exterminated, and the soul of France needed to be purified. Thus, the mobs burned the homes as well as the bodies of the dead. Crowds gathered around the banks of the rivers to "baptize" their victims in the waters.

Although largely provoked by religious violence, not all the murders had religious motivations. The slaughter that took place gave some participants a convenient way to end personal disputes; but murderers primarily targeted victims for their faith.

When the killing was over, the murderers displayed little remorse; their actions were justifiable in the eyes of much of the Catholic populace and the religious authorities. As long as rioters maintained a given religious commitment, they rarely displayed guilt or shame for their violence.<sup>372</sup> Religious bloodshed remained a legitimized action long after the events had passed.

Although it had taken years for the violence to build up to the level of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the rioting dissipated within two months. With the restoration of the Catholic community to dominance, the populace no longer needed to attack Huguenots. The massacres decimated the Reformed Church, leaving it in no shape to go on the attack. Instead, those who remained faithful to the Protestant cause avoided conflicts with their Catholic neighbors. Grudgingly, the two faiths learned to accept each other. Eventually Protestants and Catholics led separate lives, mingling primarily within public spaces and engaging in a certain amount of social integration and even intermarriage.<sup>373</sup>

The butchery of 1572 proved to be both the height of popular violence and its catharsis. Violence at the local level almost disappeared following the massacres, partly in response to the horror of the events but partly as a result of the clear majority of the Catholics.<sup>374</sup> Following the conversion of Henry IV back to Catholicism the Edict of Nantes secured a tentative existence for the Huguenots. This privilege proved to be short lived; in

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<sup>372</sup> Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 165.

<sup>373</sup> Diefendorf, "Memoirs of the Massacre," 59.

<sup>374</sup> Benedict, "Catholic Reform and Religious Coexistence," 162.

October of 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes and declared Protestantism illegal. One hundred years after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the remaining Huguenots abandoned the country in a mass exodus, leaving Catholicism as the sole state religion until the French Revolution.

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