The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629

Second Edition

MACK P. HOLT

George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

List of maps and figures page viii
Acknowledgements ix
Preface to Second Edition x
Chronological table of events xi

Introduction 1

1. Prologue: Gallicanism and reform in the sixteenth century 7
2. 'The beginning of a tragedy': the early wars of religion, 1562–1570 50
3. Popular disorder and religious tensions: the making of a massacre, 1570–1574 76
4. The rhetoric of resistance: the unmaking of the body politic, 1574–1584 99
5. 'Godly warriors': the crisis of the League, 1584–1593 123
6. Henry IV and the Edict of Nantes: the remaking of Gallicanism, 1593–1610 156
7. Epilogue: the last war of religion, 1610–1629 178
8. Conclusions: economic impact, social change, and absolutism 195

Genealogical charts 223
Brief biographies 227
Suggestions for further reading 232
Index 238

Preface to the Second Edition

It has been a decade since I wrote the text of the first edition of this book, and I am happy to accept the invitation of Cambridge University Press to produce a revised and updated edition. I wish to thank all those readers and reviewers who took the time to point out several minor errors of fact or interpretation in the first edition, especially Hilmar Pabel and Mark Greengrass, and I have silently corrected these errors in this new edition. Because so much new work has also been published in the last decade, I have also taken the opportunity of this new edition to update the text in order to incorporate much of this recent scholarship. In some cases this has resulted in the expansion of certain passages or the insertion of totally new passages. Finally, I have also rewritten the 'Suggestions for further reading'. Although these revisions have not significantly altered my original approach or the principal argument of the book, they have, I hope, resulted in a more up-to-date and satisfying book.

Introduction

Like Michel de Montaigne, perhaps I too ought to have called this book an *essai* in the original sense; for an 'attempt' is about all one can manage in the face of the confusing morass of court factions, countless leading actors and bit players, a seemingly unending series of peace agreements followed by renewed warfare, and the bizarre diplomatic intrigues of nearly every state in western Europe that made up the French Wars of Religion. It is no small wonder, then, that even specialist historians have never found explaining this conflict a particularly easy task. What is a student to make of the problem? Thus, while this book is certainly a trial or attempt to 'make the crooked straight and the rough places plain' for the reader with little background to the French religious wars of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, I hope it is also more than that. Surely any reader who picks up a book claiming to offer 'new approaches to European history' has a right to expect as much. So, perhaps it is best to sketch out exactly what is so novel about this approach right at the start.

To begin with, the pages which follow will argue at some length that the series of French civil wars which began with the massacre at Vassy in 1562 and concluded with the Peace of Alais in 1629 was a conflict fought primarily over the issue of religion. This may startle some readers, used to the generations of historians and not a few sixteenth-century contemporaries who believed steadfastly that the main actors in the religious wars only used religion as a pretext, a 'cloak' in the words of the Parisian diarist Pierre de l'Estoile, to mask their political, dynastic, or personal power struggles. Moreover, other historians (and not just Marxist historians) have interpreted the civil wars as fomented mainly by socio-economic tensions rather than ideology, as urban, skilled, mainly literate, and prosperous merchants, professionals, and artisans turned to Calvinism as a means of combatting the economic and political stranglehold of the landed elites of church and state. While I would be the first to agree that the politicization of religious issues played a significant role in shaping the course of the wars (especially during the wars of the League in the 1590s) and that socio-economic tensions were a permanent feature of early

modern French society, occasionally bubbling over into popular violence, it seems to me that religion was nevertheless the fulcrum upon which the civil wars balanced.

I am not suggesting, however, that three generations of French men and women were willing to fight and die just over differences of religious doctrine, whether it be over how to get to heaven or over what actually transpired during the celebration of mass. What this book will propose is that the French Wars of Religion were fought primarily over the issue of religion as defined in contemporary terms: as a body of believers rather than the more modern definition of a body of beliefs.[1] Thus, the emphasis here is on the social rather than the theological. In these terms, Protestants and Catholics alike in the sixteenth century each viewed the other as pollutants of their own particular notion of the body social, as threats to their own conception of ordered society. When a mob of Catholic winegrowers set fire to a barn in Beaune where a clandestine group of Protestants had observed the Lord's Supper in both kinds on Easter Sunday of 1561, for example, their actions went far beyond an expression of discontent and intolerance of the Calvinist theology of the eucharist. Those winegrowers were cleansing the body social of the pollutant of Protestantism, and in the process, preventing a dangerous and threatening cancer from spreading. By setting ablaze the barn where that pollution had taken place, they were purifying by fire the social space those Protestants had desecrated.[2] Huguenots (as French Calvinists came to be called) did perceive Catholics as superstitious believers to be sure, just as French Catholics viewed them as heretics, but the resulting clash was one of cultures as much as theologies. This is hardly a novel approach to the Wars of Religion, as Lucien Febvre pioneered more than fifty years ago the study of what has today come to be called 'religious culture'. And the specialized research of more recent practitioners such as Philip Benedict, John Bossy, Denis Crouzet, Natalie Davis, Barbara Diefendorf, Jean Delumeau, and Robert Muchembled among others, has led to a far greater understanding of what religious difference meant in sixteenth-century France (see the 'Suggestions for further reading' for

[1] For a discussion of this transformation of the definition of religion in the seventeenth century, see the perceptive comments of John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), passim, but especially pp. 170–1.

[2] This incident is recounted in Theodore Beza, *Histoire ecclésiastique des élises réformées au royaume de France*, ed. G. Baum and E. Cunitz, 3 vols. (Paris, 1883–89), I, 864, and III, 489. For other examples, see the classic interpretation of religious violence during the Wars of Religion, Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence' in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA, 1975), pp. 152–87.

bibliographic details). To date, however, no one has attempted to write a general history of the religious wars from quite this perspective.

I should point out, however, that by underscoring the religious nature of the Wars of Religion, as defined above in social terms, I am not implying that political, economic, intellectual or even other social factors ought to be de-emphasised. Not only did politics significantly matter in the sixteenth century, but as will become clear below, it was high politics that largely shaped the beginning and the end of the wars, not to mention how they were fought in between. My point is that there was a religious foundation to sixteenth-century French society that was shared by elites and popular classes alike, and it was the contestation of this essential religious fabric of both the body social and the body politic that led to the French civil wars taking the shape they did. In short, while civil war, popular revolt, and social violence were endemic to pre-modern society, it was the dynamic of religion that distinguished the sixteenth-century civil wars and resulted in the most serious crisis of French state and society before the Revolution.

Secondly, this particular attempt to explain the wars of religion will take a longer chronological perspective than most of its predecessors, which traditionally have depicted the Edict of Nantes in 1598 as the terminus of the wars. The older studies of J-H. Mariéjol, *La Réforme, la Ligue, l'Edit de Nantes, 1559–1598* (Paris, 1904) in the Lavisse series and of J. E. Neale, *The Age of Catherine de Medici* (London, 1943) as well as the more recent works of Georges Livet, *Les guerres de religion, 1559–1598* (Paris, 1962) in the *Que sais-je*? series; J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1975); and Michel Pernot, *Les guerres de religion en France 1559–1598* (Paris, 1987) all in various (and by no means similar) ways treat the Edict of Nantes as the *terminus ad quem* of the wars. Although this edict issued in 1598 is a convenient cutoff point, initiating an extended period of peace, it hardly marked the end of the fighting between Protestants and Catholics in France. More seriously, by ending the story in 1598 there is the implicit danger the reader might be persuaded that the Edict of Nantes was meant to establish a permanent settlement of co-existence between the two religions with a measure of toleration on both sides. According to the traditional interpretation, this settlement was brought about by a growing group of 'modern thinking' men in the 1590s called 'politiques', who felt that the survival of the state was more important than ridding the kingdom of heresy, especially as forty years of civil war had not achieved the defeat of the Huguenots. Putting religious differences aside, they turned to the newly converted Henry IV to end the violence and restore law and order. Mariéjol, Neale, and Livet go out of their way to underscore that this was indeed the case,

and by implication suggest that had it not been for the less tolerant policies of Louis XIII and Richelieu that Henry IV's edict of 1598 might have survived. 'The wars demonstrated', noted Georges Livet at the end of his brief summary of the conflict, 'that religious unity was an impossibility in late sixteenth-century France. The only solution possible if the country was to survive was the co-existence, albeit regulated and limited, of the two religions.'[3] The perspective presented here, while hardly novel in itself, will suggest that the Edict of Nantes was never intended by Henry IV or his 'politique' supporters to be more than a temporary settlement, to end the violence in order to try to win back by conversion those remaining Huguenots to the Roman Catholic church. Indeed, Henry himself urged his former co-religionnaires to emulate his own example and abjure the Protestant religion. This perspective stresses the continuity in the aims of Henry IV and Louis XIII rather than a dichotomy. Both monarchs had the same goal in mind: the traditional *un roi, une foi, une loi* – that is, one king, one faith, and one law – of their ancestors. Their means of achieving this goal certainly differed – with Louis XIII and Richelieu abandoning Henry's carrot of conversion in favour of a return to the stick of suppression – but an analysis of their policies suggests that their religious aims were not wholly dissimilar. Moreover, this perspective counters the traditional claim that the 'politique' supporters of Henry IV in the 1590s were a more 'modern' group of secular, political men with sceptical attitudes toward religious ideology. 'Liberty of conscience and toleration', Livet concluded, 'the foundation of a secular state, were two ideas dearly bought which defined the originality of Henry IV's French solution [in the Edict of Nantes]'.[4] No matter how hard generations of liberal, Protestant historians have tried to separate 'one faith' from 'one law' and 'one king', in the sixteenth century no such dissolution was possible.

Finally, in order to take account of recent work by historians on both sides of the Atlantic, the most stimulating of which has been in the area of social and cultural history, this perspective will take on a decidedly more popular and provincial look than most histories of the Wars of Religion. I have done my best to write as balanced an account as possible, in view of the many partisan accounts of the wars that still seem to surface. Doubtless much of the polemic is the result of the contemporary sixteenth-century rhetoric in the sources, where partisans of both sides tended to speak out much more often than more moderate voices, which

[3] Georges Livet, *Les guerres de religion* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977 edn.), p. 122.
[4] Ibid., p. 123.

were in a distinct minority in any case. As will become apparent, in a clash of cultures such as the religious wars it is easy for the historian to swallow whole the Catholic views of Protestants as 'seditious rebels' and the Huguenot view of French Catholics as 'superstitious idolators'. These perceptions clearly should be treated as stereotypes rather than reflections of social reality, as insiders describing outsiders, members of one culture depicting a counter-culture. As such, they reveal much more about the creator of these images than their intended targets. This is not to suggest that many Protestants were not in fact rebelling against the crown or that some Catholics were not superstitious. Historians such as Peter Burke and Roger Chartier, however, have much to say on how to 'read' these texts. They can reveal a great deal, but about what, or whom? Even self-perceptions need to be treated with care, as the Catholics' view of themselves as 'guardians of law and tradition' and the Protestant perception of themselves as the 'persecuted minority' are stereotypes. None of these stereotypes was wholly fact or fiction, but the point is that the stereotype itself can tell us a great deal about the motivations of its creator whether it reflected social reality very well or not.[5]

Although my goal throughout has been to try to write a balanced account, some readers will be able to detect a distinctly Burgundian flavour to the book. This is explained by the fact that I had already been working for two years on a study of the political and religious culture in Burgundy during the Wars of Religion when I was approached to write this volume. I have made a genuine attempt, however, to balance my perspective with examples from other parts of France, or have only chosen to illustrate my story with episodes from Dijon, Beaune, and Auxonne which I thought were characteristic of France as a whole. Nevertheless, I apologize if some readers still find the aroma of *pinot noir* and *moutarde* too pungent for their palates; perhaps it will whet the appetite of others.

I should also stress that the decision to write a more 'popular' history was not shaped by any political agenda, social cause, or moral duty to write a history of 'the common man' (not to mention woman) in the Wars of Religion. Such attempts often do no more than trivialize or patronize the subjects they are trying to elevate, and they can be just as one-sided as those histories written from the perspective of the elites. Moreover, decisions taken by kings to wage war or raise taxes had just as much a

[5] Although many of their works could be cited, see particularly Peter Burke, 'Perceiving a Counter-Culture', in his *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 63–75; and Roger Chartier, 'Les élites et les gueux', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 21 (1974), 376–88.

direct impact on the lives of most French men and women as climatic changes or declining birthrates. Thus, the attempt here is to eschew the traditional court-centred approach in favour of one that takes into account what the wars meant to those who lived in the towns and in the countryside, not because it is more fashionable or more important, but because ordinary French men and women bore just as many of the hardships of the wars as courtiers and soldiers. One cannot ignore altogether the central actors, who after all made the decisions that mattered in waging war for half a century; but surely it is time someone attempted to grasp the nettle and tried to integrate the new research of the past twenty-five years with the traditional historical narrative of the civil wars into a digestible form suitable for student and teacher alike. Of course, this perspective is not the only way to view the religious wars, and I would urge interested readers to explore the many other useful and valid attempts to make sense of this complicated period. And I hardly need add that this is not a 'total history' of the civil wars, much less a comprehensive history of France from 1562 to 1629. It is simply one historian's 'attempt' at making sense of a complex problem that still plagues the world at the advent of the twenty-first century: religious wars.

1 Prologue: Gallicanism and reform in the sixteenth century

Ever since the Middle Ages French kings were both consecrated and crowned during the coronation ceremony that marked their ascension to the throne. And though French ceremonial shared much in common with English coronations across the Channel, by the sixteenth century it was clear that the constitutional aspects of the ceremony so emphasized in England took a backseat to the liturgical nature of the coronation so heavily accentuated in France. The ceremony itself was called a *sacre* in France, emphasizing consecration rather than coronation. Patterned after the first such ceremony, the crowning of Charlemagne by the pope in Rome in the year 800, French coronations traditionally took place in the cathedral church of Reims with the local archbishop officiating. With the ecclesiastical and lay peers of the realm, as well as the bishops of the French church and the royal princes of the blood assembled around him, the new king was required to make explicit his duties and responsibilities to the Christian church in his coronation oath. In the first part of the oath, called the ecclesiastical oath, the king swore: 'I shall protect the canonical privilege, due law, and justice, and I shall exercise defense of each bishop and of each church committed to him, as much as I am able – with God's help – just as a king ought properly to do in his kingdom.' Then in the concluding section, called the oath of the kingdom, the king further underscored his duty to defend the church as well as the kingdom. 'To this Christian populace subject to me, I promise in the name of Christ: First, that by our authority the whole Christian populace will preserve at all times true peace for the Church of God . . . Also, that in good faith to all men I shall be diligent to expel from my land and also from the jurisdiction subject to me all heretics designated by the Church. I affirm by oath all this said above.' Then, each new king of France would be consecrated as the archbishop anointed him with the sacred oil of the holy ampulla, anointing his body and smearing the sign of the cross on his forehead as he uttered, 'I anoint you king with sanctified oil. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' This was the highlight of the entire ceremony, as the holy oil connected the new king to

God as well as to all his predecessors of the previous thousand years (since, according to legend, a dove had first delivered the holy ampulla upon the occasion of the baptism of Clovis and all French kings had been anointed with it ever since). Only after consecration was the new monarch addressed as king and presented with his crown, sceptre, and regal vestments. The coronation concluded with prayers, psalms, and the celebration of mass, where the sacerdotal nature of French kingship was underscored once again as the newly consecrated and crowned monarch partook of the eucharist in both kinds – the host and the communion cup – demonstrating that in this one moment at least he was more priest than ordinary layman.

This assemblage of language, symbols, and gestures was anything but coincidental. Though the coronation ceremony had clearly evolved and been amended to meet changing political needs over the centuries, by the sixteenth century one historical constant at least was clear: the enfolding together of the French monarchy and the Catholic church. The language and symbols of the French coronation went far beyond the usual ecclesiastical overtones surrounding other monarchs of western Christendom, all of whom paid homage to their Lord as the true dispenser of their authority and on whose behalf they acted as his secular sword on earth. For French kings as well as their subjects the anointing with the sanctified oil of the holy ampulla, the explicit promise to defend the church from heresy, and the public display of the celebration of mass in both kinds were all signifiers full of meaning, as well as evidence that in France there was a special relationship between church and state that was not duplicated elsewhere. As Jean Golein, a fourteenth-century commentator, had described it, when each new king removed his clothing for the consecration, 'that signifies that he relinquishes his previous worldly estate in order to assume that of the royal religion, and if he does that with the devotion with which he should, I think that he is washed of his sins just as much as whoever newly enters orthodox religion'. While the pope may have recognized and singled out other monarchs for their service to God with special appellations – Ferdinand and Isabella were called 'Catholic kings' and Henry VIII was 'defender of the faith' – French kings had earned a much older and more redoubtable title: *Rex christianissimus*, the 'most Christian king'. Thus, the *sacres* of the kings of France were more than culturally replete symbols of the sacred nature of French kingship denoting a special relationship with God. As the General Assembly of the Clergy declared in 1625, French kings were not only ordained by God, 'they themselves were gods'. And as the Wars of Religion were to demonstrate, the special powers of these god-kings were accompanied by explicit responsibilities, the foremost of which was combatting heresy.

In Protestant England, by contrast, although their kings were also perceived to be quasi-sacred and appointed by God, the coronation imagery symbols were taken much less seriously. The holy oil with which English kings were anointed was 'but a ceremony', as Thomas Cranmer declared to Edward VI upon his coronation in 1547. The 'solemn rites of coronation' were nothing but 'good admonitions' to the king. That Cranmer was making a very Protestant point in this instance only underscores the ties between the French *sacre* and the traditional Catholic church.[1] (Map 1 shows France during the period under discussion here.)

Naturally, the sacerdotal and god-like powers bestowed on French kings in their *sacres* necessarily required some sort of accommodation with the ultimate temporal authority in matters spiritual, the papacy. And it was this relationship between monarch and pope that had largely shaped the king's ability to govern the Gallican church in France. The term 'Gallican' itself was used by contemporaries to denote just such a peculiar (or rather independent) relationship between the French church and Rome; and the sacerdotal king of France stood as a prophylactic barrier to protect the Gallican liberties from papal intervention. By the sixteenth century, however, royal domination of the French church had become so strong that the Parlement of Paris, the supreme sovereign court in the realm, found itself faced with the prospect of protecting and guaranteeing the Gallican liberties of the French church from the grasp of royal rather than papal interference. 'By 1515', notes the historian R. J. Knecht, 'royal control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was an acknowledged fact'.[2]

This was nowhere more evident than in the Concordat of Bologna of 1516. Because of the changing dynastic situation of the early sixteenth century, with the Valois at war against the Habsburgs in Italy over disputed possessions in Milan and Naples, Francis I sorely needed papal support for his military adventures in Italy. In return for support from Pope Leo X, Francis virtually decimated the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges of 1438: an agreement whereby king and pope had agreed to let cathedral chapters elect both bishops and abbots independent of royal and papal control. The king not only assumed the right to nominate directly candidates for vacant bishoprics and archbishoprics, but also to fill vacancies in the principal abbeys and monasteries in the realm.

[1] For an analysis of the French coronation ceremony see Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), quotations from pp. 20, 57–8, 215, and 218. Cranmer's speech to Edward VI quoted in Peter Burke, 'The Repudiation of Ritual in Early Modern Europe', in his *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 233.

[2] R. J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 53.

Map 1 France during the Wars of Religion

In return, Leo received the right to veto any of Francis's nominations if they were unqualified (bishops, for example, had to be twenty-seven years old and trained in theology or canon law) as well as the right to collect annates (one year's revenues) from all newly appointed holders of benefices. Though the papacy had clearly much to gain by the Concordat,

it was Francis who really benefitted from it most by winning almost unprecedented power of appointment in the Gallican church. And while the remonstrances of the Parlement of Paris – which refused initially to register the Concordat – were couched in anti-papal language, it was evident that the court's concern was over Francis's decision to trample upon the Pragmatic Sanction which guaranteed the church's Gallican liberties and independence. The point of the entire episode, however, is that when all the smoke had finally cleared the Parlement was forced to recognize the power of appointment the king had won. Although it would be a mistake to assume that Francis had won anywhere near the independence and total break with Rome effected by Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII in England just a couple of decades later, it is true to say that the growth of royal power in the ecclesiastical realm in France in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was such that interference from Rome was never a serious issue in determining French reaction to Protestantism. And while many doctors of the Sorbonne (the theology school of the University of Paris) may have wished for a more ultramontane (that is, papal) look to French ecclesiastical policy, the symbol of consecrated king as guardian of both church and state ultimately guaranteed that the French monarch rather than the pope was to oversee the safekeeping of God's Gallican flock. Jean du Tillet, a historian and clerk in the Parlement of Paris, made this clear in a tract he wrote in 1551 called 'On the liberties of the Gallican church':

> Malady has always been the result when the absolute power of the said Popes has been admitted and received in this kingdom. The means to good government in this kingdom is that the two jurisdictions, ecclesiastic and temporal, are both harmoniously administered together under and by the authority of the said kings . . . When bishoprics have been vacant, it is well known . . . that since the time of Charlemagne the kings have appointed them.

Du Tillet went on to point out that even if custom later dictated that 'the clergy and the people' had come to elect these benefices, it was after all only because Charlemagne 'had permitted the elections of the bishoprics to the said clergy and people' in the first place.[3] Thus, the symbol of the consecrated king acting as priest during his coronation was much more than a meaningless gesture of tradition in the sixteenth century. It underscored to every Frenchman who witnessed it that one of the king's principal tasks was to safeguard the church, as his coronation oath made explicit. Moreover, Du Tillet's sentiments only reflected what

[3] Jean du Tillet, *Memoire & advis de M. Jean du Tillet, protenotaire et Secretaire du Roy tres-Chrestien, Greffier de sa cour de Parlement. Faict en l'an 1551 sur les libertez de l'Eglise Gallicane* (n.p., 1594 edn.), pp. 4–5 and 7.

was made clear in the *sacre* itself. Jean Jouvenal des Ursins was the archbishop of Reims, who, when consecrating Louis XI in 1461, summed up the king's power within the Gallican church very nicely: 'As far as you are concerned, my sovereign lord, you are not simply a layman but a spiritual personage, a prelate . . . You may pass judgment on the liberties and freedoms of your church and erect them into a law, an ordinance, a pragmatic sanction, and you may take all due and proper measures to see that the law is kept and observed.'[4]

One of the unfortunate by-products of increased royal control of ecclesiastical patronage in the early sixteenth century, however, was the explicit growth of corruption and decline of spirituality among the episcopate as a whole within the Gallican church. In short, Francis I and his son Henry II used their unprecedented powers of appointment to fill the ranks of the episcopacy with their clients, relatives, and political allies. In Francis's reign (1515–47), for example, of the total of 129 bishops he appointed, 102 were either princes of the blood or members of the nobility of the sword, that is, members of the most powerful as well as oldest noble families in France. And the fact that so few of these bishops met the requirements of the Concordat of Bologna regarding theological training clearly indicates that their commitment was to the monarchy rather than to the church. In the reign of Henry II (1547–59), of the 80 bishops appointed by the king only 3 had theology degrees while 15 had studied canon law – a total of only 23 per cent – despite the requirements of the Concordat. Moreover, the fact that over one-fourth of Henry's appointments to vacant sees (21 out of 80) went to Italians, nearly all of them clients of the pope or other Italian allies of the French monarchy in the wars against the Habsburgs in Italy, indicates that political patronage rather than spirituality was the ultimate by-product of royal control of the Gallican church. The inevitable result was corruption and blatant absenteeism among the upper echelons of the church hierarchy. Of the 101 incumbent bishops in 1559, for example, it has been determined that only 19 resided in their dioceses regularly. And taking into account the fact that there were still many other vacancies and pluralities (that is, examples of one bishop holding two or more dioceses simultaneously), one can say that 65 per cent of all French bishops in 1559 did not live in or visit their dioceses on a regular basis. Examples of the most blatant offenders just underscore how chronic the problem was. François de Foix, bishop of Aire in Gascony, for example, never even set foot in his diocese in the twenty-four years he was its bishop. While in

[4] Quoted in J. H. Shennan, *Government and Society in France, 1461–1661* (London, 1969), p. 84.

1547 alone, the cardinals of Este, Armagnac, Lorraine, Tournon, Longwy, Du Bellay, and Louis and Charles of Bourbon all held at least three sees apiece. A number of bishops were neither ordained nor consecrated, further making a mockery of ecclesiastical appointment. Thus, while the state of the French church by the middle of the sixteenth century certainly warranted the many vocal outcries for reform that echoed throughout France at the advent of the Reformation, it was also symptomatic of the peculiar nature of the Gallican church where there was no separation of church and state. Both kings and prelates alike viewed service to the crown as service to the church, and vice versa, as the king's sworn duty to protect the church really rested on his ability to place his own men in positions of influence in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. As the threat of heresy from both Lutheranism and Calvinism began to loom large in the 1530s and 1540s, it is perhaps less surprising that Francis I and Henry II should want to make sure that those who administered the Gallican church were above all else loyal servants of the Most Christian King.[5]

Calls for reform were not just the result of the deplorable state of the French clergy in the early sixteenth century but were based on a tradition that went back well into the late Middle Ages. The secular tradition of the revival of antiquity which emerged in Renaissance Italy had become fused in northern Europe in the late fifteenth century with a distinctly religious revival. This movement had decidedly spiritual and mystical overtones, which took shape in the form of contemplation, prayer, and inner devotion. Earmarked by works such as Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ,* the ideas of this movement came to embody both the scholarly methodology of the Italian humanists as well as the inner spirituality of the *Devotio moderna*, or 'modern devotion', of northern Europe. As a result, throughout the intellectual centres of Europe in the early sixteenth century, and particularly in Paris, there emerged what one scholar has dubbed the 'pre-reform', or a movement of thinkers who not only sought to reform the obvious abuses within the church, but who also sought to establish a new and more scholarly platform upon which to question traditional religion. Although historians have traditionally called these thinkers 'Christian humanists', in an effort to underscore their hybrid intellectual ancestry from both Renaissance Italy and northern Europe, there were many different currents and debates within this 'pre-reform'. Men such as Erasmus of Rotterdam and Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, a Frenchman from Picardy, both of whom were in Paris in the 1490s and

[5] Much of this paragraph is based on Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Change and Continuity in the French Episcopate: The Bishops and the Wars of Religion, 1547–1610* (Durham, NC, 1986), pp. 110–13.

early 1500s, came to exemplify this 'pre-reform' movement in their quest to effect religious renewal. Though biblical scholarship and the ultimate goal of presenting scripture to the laity in the vernacular were foundations of both men's work, which made their ideas heterodox, it must be remembered that they were both scholars and spiritual writers rather than true reformers in the mold of Luther. Indeed, Erasmus and Lefèvre d'Etaples were both characteristic of the 'pre-reform' as a whole in their insistence in maintaining the unity of the Christian church despite their unorthodox ideas; thus, 'pre-reformers' were clearly not proto-Protestants.[6]

It is nevertheless true that many of the intellectual currents that emerged from the French 'pre-reform' shared much in common with explicitly Protestant ideas, particularly those of Martin Luther. This group had shifted from Paris to Meaux, just east of the capital along the Marne, after 1516 when Guillaume Briçonnet was appointed the new bishop there. Briçonnet, who was abbot of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris prior to his bishopric in Meaux, had attempted reforms in his abbey along the lines of those suggested by Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, whom Briçonnet had in fact sheltered there. In Meaux this intellectual circle widened considerably to include not only clerics and scholars – Lefèvre d'Etaples was appointed Briçonnet's vicar general, for example – but a fair number of locals from the lower orders of society at large. Most visible of all were the new preachers hired by Briçonnet, each of whom was permanently assigned to one of thirty-two sub-divisions of the parishes in the city to further evangelism and religious renewal. Above all, men such as Gérard Roussel, François Vatable, Martial Mazurier, and Guillaume Farel among the most notable, began a regime of reading scripture to their parishioners during mass, particularly the gospels and St Paul's epistles. It was out of this biblical tradition that Lefèvre d'Etaples came to publish a vernacular French translation of the gospels in June 1523, a French translation of the entire New Testament later that same year, and by 1530 the whole of the holy scriptures in French. Lefèvre d'Etaples, it should be remembered, had a proven track record of biblical scholarship, having published his own critical Latin edition of the epistles based on Greek manuscripts in 1512, pointing out four years before Erasmus that the Latin Vulgate translation of St Jerome was not without error.

[6] For the 'pre-reform' in Paris see Augustin Renaudet, *Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie, 1494–1517* (Paris, 2nd edn. 1953). For a brief summary of this work in English, see the same author's 'Paris from 1494 to 1517', in Werner L. Gundersheimer, ed., *French Humanism, 1470–1600* (London, 1969), pp. 65–89.

As heterodox as the Meaux circle's emphasis on vernacular scripture may have seemed at the time, however, it probably would have been viewed as just another revival of spirituality rather than as heresy had it not been for the widespread publicity and propagation in France of the ideas of the Saxon monk, Martin Luther. The role of the printing press in disseminating Luther's critiques of the special St Peter's indulgence contained in his 'Ninety-five theses' of 1517, and his emphasis on justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of scripture in his three treatises of 1520 has long been a commonplace of the Lutheran Reformation. And it was ominous for the Meaux circle when the faculty of the Sorbonne censured and condemned Luther's writings as heretical in 1521: especially his rejection of free will and insistence on justification by faith rather than good works as the way to salvation, since these ideas were close to Lefèvre's own views. The issue of salvation, of course, was the principal sticking point between Luther and Rome, and the German monk's insistence that salvation depended entirely on God's grace and that man's efforts mattered not a whit could not easily be reconciled with the medieval church's emphasis on acts of charity and good works. Even though some of the younger and more radical members of the Meaux group were clearly leaning in this direction (most notably Guillaume Farel), the Sorbonne's misguided belief that Briçonnet and Lefèvre d'Etaples were organizing a Protestant and heretical sect in Meaux resembling Luther's flock in Saxony was erroneous. When first confronted with charges of heresy in 1523, Briçonnet responded by requiring all his preachers to make explicit in their sermons their fundamental belief in some of the traditionally Catholic doctrines that were attacked by Luther: the existence of purgatory, the efficacy of prayers to the Virgin Mary and the community of saints, etc. Briçonnet even withdrew licences to preach from a number of the most radical members of his circle, but the Sorbonne remained convinced that they were spreading heresy in Meaux. Things finally came to a head in 1525 when both the Sorbonne and the Parlement of Paris broke up the circle for good. Some like Briçonnet, simply recanted and abandoned all efforts at spiritual reform to return to the practices of the traditional church. Many others, however, like Lefèvre d'Etaples and Farel, fled into exile, most notably to the German-speaking city of Strasbourg. While a few like the very elderly Lefèvre d'Etaples remained technically Catholic for the rest of their lives despite their unorthodox views, many others emulated his pupil Farel, who not only publicly converted to Protestantism but ten years later would join another French exile, the young John Calvin, in Geneva. For the moment, however, that segment of the Gallican church which defined orthodox

doctrine, the faculty of the Sorbonne, had beaten back the first French experiment in 'pre-reform'.[7]

But what was the reaction of the crown to all of this? Though one might expect the Most Christian King to remain as staunchly opposed to any form of heterodoxy as the doctors of the Sorbonne, Francis I was actively supportive of Christian humanist scholarship generally and the 'pre-reform' circle at Meaux in particular. To be sure, Francis was one of the first to denounce Lutheranism as heresy, but this was not necessarily inconsistent with his patronage of humanist scholarship. That a Guillaume Farel could flee Meaux in order to convert to Protestantism does indicate the fluid boundary between the evangelical spirituality of the Briçonnet circle and Lutheranism. But as already mentioned, 'pre-reformers' were not necessarily 'proto-Protestants', even though there were no clear-cut boundaries between them in the 1520s and 1530s, except in the eyes of the zealous theologians of the Sorbonne, where any deviation from its narrowly defined scholasticism was deemed heretical. Thus, Francis could quite easily reconcile his opposition to Protestantism with his support for humanist scholarship. After all, if his coronation oath required him to protect the Gallican church, this meant guarding it from ignorance as well as from heresy. Therefore, when Francis decided to found a college of higher learning devoted to classical scholarship in 1517, he invited the most renowned scholar in Europe – Erasmus of Rotterdam – to head what would become the Collège de France. Though the itinerant Erasmus politely declined, the king's choice was a clear sign of his intention to patronize Christian learning at the highest level. More to the point, when the Sorbonne tried to add the writings of both Erasmus and Lefèvre d'Etaples to their index of heretical works in 1523–24, their Greek and vernacular translations of the scripture in particular, Francis stepped in and forbade the doctors from discussing their works on the grounds that they were reputable scholars known all over Europe. It should also be pointed out that the king's sister, Marguerite of Angoulême (who would later become queen of Navarre when she married Henri d'Albret in 1527), was actually a humanist writer herself as well as a disciple of the Meaux circle, and carried on a very close correspondence with bishop Briçonnet during the early 1520s. When the Sorbonne and the Parlement of Paris finally dissolved that group despite royal patronage in 1525, Marguerite provided refuge and jobs to a

[7] Much of the preceding two paragraphs is based on the contemporary account compiled by the Protestant deputy to Calvin in Geneva, Theodore Beza, *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1883–89 edn.), I, 10–14; as well as Mark Greengrass, *The French Reformation* (London, 1987), pp. 14–20.

number of them, including the elderly Lefèvre d'Etaples who died at her court at Nérac in 1536. Though her major writings, *Mirror of the Sinful Soul* and *Heptaméron,* did share certain heterodox ideas with the works of her mentors, like them she never abandoned the Gallican church for Protestantism, which was still not clearly defined in any case. That both Francis and Marguerite could so easily distinguish humanist scholarship from what they viewed as heresy, in fact, was clearly underscored in their reaction to the famous 'Placards affair' of 1534.[8]

In the early hours of Sunday morning, 18 October 1534, a great number of small, printed broadsheets were posted in conspicuous places throughout Paris and a number of other cities throughout northern France. Organized by a band of French Protestant exiles in Switzerland, the placards were intended to be seen by French Catholics on their way to mass later that morning. The author of the four brief paragraphs printed on the placards was one Antoine Marcourt, a French Protestant pamphleteer who was then residing in the Swiss city of Neuchâtel. The bold headline of the placard, printed in large capital letters, made it very clear that this was an organized attack on the holy eucharist: 'TRUE ARTICLES ON THE HORRIBLE, GROSS AND INSUFFERABLE ABUSES OF THE PAPAL MASS, invented directly contrary to the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ'. The vitriolic and polemical text went on to say that 'I invoke heaven and earth as witnesses to the truth against this pompous and arrogant popish mass, by which the whole world (if God does not soon remedy it) will be completely ruined, cast down, lost, and desolated; and because our Lord is so outrageously blasphemed and the people seduced and blinded by it, it can no longer be allowed to endure.' The placard went on to spell out four specific arguments against the Catholic mass in turn: (1) that since Christ had already performed a perfect sacrifice on the Cross, it was both unnecessary and blasphemous to pretend to repeat this sacrifice at Holy Communion; (2) that although the Catholic church falsely claims that 'Jesus Christ is corporally, really, and in fact entirely and personally in the flesh contained and concealed in the species of bread and wine, as grand and perfect as if he were living in the present', scripture makes it very clear that his body is with God in Heaven and cannot be in any way present in the bread and wine; (3) that the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is thus 'the doctrine of devils against all truth and openly contrary to all scripture'; and (4) that Communion is thus just a symbol in reverence of the memory of Christ's perfect sacrifice, not a miracle of sorts all over

[8] Much of this paragraph is based on Knecht, *Francis I*, pp. 132–45.

again. The most excoriating rhetoric was reserved for the end of the last paragraph, however:

> By this [mass] the poor people are like ewes or miserable sheep, kept and maintained by these bewitching wolves [Catholic priests], then eaten, gnawed, and devoured. Is there anyone who would not say or think that this is larceny and debauchery? By this mass they have seized, destroyed, and swallowed up everything; they have disinherited kings, princes, nobles, merchants, and everyone else imaginable either dead or alive. Because of it, they live without any duties or responsibility to anyone or anything, even to the need to study. What more do you want? Do not be amazed then that they defend it with such force. They kill, burn, destroy, and murder as brigands all those who contradict them, for now all they have left is force. Truth is lacking in them, but it menaces them, follows them, and chases them; and in the end truth will find them out. By it they shall be destroyed. Fiat. Fiat. Amen.

The polemic of the placard was so acerbic, in fact, that even Theodore Beza, Calvin's future deputy in Geneva, distanced himself from it when he compiled the official history of the French Protestant church a few decades later. 'Everything was shattered by the indiscreet zeal of a few', he wrote, 'who having drawn up and printed certain articles in a sharp and violent style against the mass in the form of a placard in the Swiss city of Neuchâtel, not only posted and disseminated them throughout the squares and thoroughfares of the city of Paris, against the advice of some wiser heads, but they even posted one on the door of the king's bedchamber, who was then at Blois.' Though Francis I was actually a few miles west of Blois at his château at Amboise, Beza realized well enough the mistake of imposing one of these placards upon the royal person himself.[9]

Yet what so shocked and outraged French men and women on their way to mass that Sunday morning, indeed what made the 'Affair of the placards' so revolutionary, was not so much the heterodox doctrine of the eucharist itself but rather its social implications. For lay French Catholics the mass was the principal focus of reconciliation and communal satisfaction. Before receiving the host the communicants were required to seek forgiveness of their sins and redress any grievances with their neighbours. Only then could they be enjoined together by the sacrifice and satisfaction of the priest with the entire community of Christ living and dead. Thus, the 'communion' of the entire ritual was not so much a symbol to underscore the bond between an individual and God as the bond between the communicants themselves. As both John Bossy (for Catholics) and

[9] The text of the placard is printed as an appendix in the best study of the entire affair, Gabrielle Berthoud, *Antoine Maracourt, réformateur et pamphlétaire: du 'Livres des marchands' aux placards de 1534* (Geneva, 1973), pp. 287–9. Theodore Beza's reflection is in his *Histoire ecclésiastique*, I, 28–9.

David Sabean (for Lutherans) have demonstrated in their respective work, sixteenth-century Christians on both sides of the confessional divide were well aware of the serious consequences that awaited them should they go to mass without first attempting to remedy whatever discord existed in their own community. 'Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner', according to St Paul (I Corinthians 11:27), 'will be guilty of profaning the body and the blood of the Lord'. And the result was that parishioners who were unable to overcome any personal discord generally stayed at home during the celebration of mass. It was only in the celebration of Communion that 'hostility became impersonal and retired beyond the borders of the community, to lurk in a dark exterior cast into more frightful shadow by the visible brightness of heaven among them'.[10] Or as Virginia Reinburg has shown so convincingly, for lay Catholics the mass 'was less sacrifice and sacrament than a communal rite of greeting, sharing, giving, receiving, and making peace'.[11] Thus, for French men and women on their way to mass that Sunday morning in 1534 the savage attack on the eucharist as evidenced in the 'sacramentarian' placards was much more than just a doctrinal joust with their Gallican theology; it was perceived as a dagger stuck in the heart of the body social.

On a somewhat different level, the placards were also an affront and threat to the body politic. Certainly Francis I viewed with alarm the last paragraph of the placard, excoriating Catholic priests for disinheriting kings and princes, even had it not been nailed to the door of his own royal bedchamber. But more generally, as the Most Christian King any attack on the authority of priests and the Catholic religion threatened to undermine his authority as sovereign ruler of France as well. Moreover, the 'sacramentarian' denial of the real presence in the eucharistic elements was an assault on the co-existence of the temporal and the sacred. Yet the king himself embodied that very same fusion of human and divine as his consecration and coronation *sacre* made abundantly clear. He even received Communion himself immediately upon acquiring his sacred and temporal authority to illustrate that very fact. Thus, for all these reasons the Protestants who disseminated the placards in October 1534 were viewed very differently from evangelical humanists like Briçonnet and Lefèvre d'Etaples. Unlike the latter who never threatened the

[10] John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 69. Also see the same author's 'The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700', *Past and Present*, no. 100 (1983), 29–61; and David Warren Sabean, 'Communion and Community: the Refusal to Attend the Lord's Supper in the Sixteenth Century', in his *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 37–60.

[11] Virginia Reinburg, 'Liturgy and Laity in Late Medieval and Reformation France', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 23 (Fall 1992), 532.

Catholic church or the Gallican monarchy, the perpetrators of 1534 were not just heretics, but rebels. It is thus no surprise that just a few years later Francis authorized the sovereign courts of the crown – Parlements as well as lower courts – to take over the prosecution of heresy from the inquisitional courts of the church. The edict which put this into effect noted specifically that prosecuting heresy was 'a question of a seditious crime and the agitation of the state and public tranquility', and that even harbouring heretics was 'in itself a crime of divine and temporal *lèse-majesté,* popular sedition, and a disturbance of our state and the public peace'.[12] This more than anything else explains why Francis reacted as he did to the 'Affair of the placards' with calls for justice and retribution against all 'Lutherans', the catch-all term most Frenchmen used for any Protestants.

In the immediate aftermath, however, a search for culprits began and at least six were rounded up and burned by the end of November. When Francis returned to Paris in December, moreover, he ordered a general religious procession through the city, the likes of which the capital had never witnessed. On 21 January 1535 this spectacular event took place, and the intermingling of the sacred and profane, the royal and divine, could not have been more calculated or more explicit. The corporate community of Paris was represented: the monarchy, the law courts, the University of Paris, the religious orders, magistrates of the city hall, and members of the various craft guilds. Significantly, a number of religious relics were also displayed in the procession, including the crown of thorns normally displayed in the Sainte-Chapelle, which caused some people's hair to stand on end when they sighted it according to one witness. The principal focus of the entire event, however, was the *Corpus Christi*, the holy sacrament itself, borne by the bishop of Paris, who himself was walking reverently under a royal canopy carried by four princes of the blood (Francis's three young sons and the duke of Vendôme). And behind the sacrament walked Francis himself, bareheaded and dressed in black. The co-existence of the royal and the sacred, the king and his royal offspring walking together with the very sacrament which had been profaned and desecrated by the 'sacramentarians' just three months earlier, could not have been more explicit. The day's events culminated with prayers, masses, and the execution of six more heretics just in case anyone had overlooked the point of the entire exercise. While recent historians are quite right to point out that the 'Affair of the placards' did not in itself turn Francis I from a monarch sympathetic to heterodoxy into a

[12] Isambert, *et al., Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises, depuis l'an 420, jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789*, XIII (Paris, 1828), 679–80 (edict of 1 June 1540).

bloodthirsty persecutor of heretics, it was one of those signal events which did help to crystallize and underscore the difference between heterodoxy and heresy. And from 1534, most French Catholics forever perceived that Protestantism and rebellion went hand in hand.[13]

In the wave of persecutions that followed the 'Affair of the placards', one of the many who fled France into exile was twenty-five year old John Calvin (1509–64). Trained as a lawyer at the Universities of Orléans and Bourges, Calvin's legal background which immersed him deeply in Christian humanist scholarship would play a major role in shaping the thought and ideas of this would-be reformer. Unlike Luther, who was not a product of a Christian humanist education, Calvin was enamored with classical learning in the same way that Lefèvre d'Etaples was in Meaux. Calvin had written a humanist commentary on a treatise of Seneca in 1532, which had given him some small degree of notoriety among French humanists. And the reformer was even sheltered by Margaret of Angoulême at her court in Nérac in 1534, where he had the chance to meet and discuss his ideas with Lefèvre d'Etaples directly. By January 1535, however, when he arrived in Basel from France in the wake of the 'Affair of the placards', Calvin had already become infused with the evangelicism of a still undefined Protestantism. As he himself noted much later, 'So it came to pass that I was withdrawn from the study of arts and was transferred to the study of law. I endeavoured faithfully to apply myself to this, in obedience to my father's wishes. But God, by the secret hand of his providence, eventually pointed my life in a different direction.'[14] Moreover, his stay in Switzerland allowed him to come in contact with some of the leaders of his generation of Protestant reformers, above all, Guillaume Farel in Geneva and Martin Bucer in Strasbourg. Although Calvin had already broken with Rome when he published the first edition of his famous *Institution of the Christian Religion* in Basel early the next year in March 1536, it was his sojourn in Strasbourg from 1538 to 1541 which fundamentally forged and shaped his evangelical ideas, as later editions of the *Institution* would make clear.

After the wave of repression in France in 1534–35 and Calvin's own exile, it is ironic that the first edition of the *Institution* should be dedicated to none other than the French king Francis I. Although some historians have suggested that Calvin may have felt that Francis was still wavering

[13] A number of points in this and the preceding paragraph are based on Knecht, *Francis I*, pp. 248–52; and Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. pp. 13–19, 199, and 324.

[14] From Calvin's introduction to his *Commentary upon the Book of Psalms* (1557), quoted in G. R. Potter and Mark Greengrass, eds., *John Calvin* (London, 1983), p. 10.

on whether to continue his persecution of Protestants and was thus hoping to influence the king to become more sympathetic to the movement, the bulk of the preface is concerned chiefly with trying to prove that French Protestants were not the seditious rebels and disturbers of the public peace they were perceived to be since the 'Affair of the placards'. Since the boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy were still not as well defined as the Sorbonne pretended, Calvin certainly hoped to persuade the king to change his mind. The dedicatory preface to the *Institution* was thus really an apology for his countrymen's actions in France.

> But I return to you, O King. May you be not at all moved by those vain accusations with which our adversaries are trying to inspire terror in you: that by this new gospel (for so they call it) men strive and seek only after the opportunity for seditions and impugnity for all crimes . . . And we are unjustly charged, too, with intentions of . . . contriving the overthrow of kingdoms – we, from whom not one seditious word was ever heard . . . [and] who do not cease to pray for the full prosperity of yourself and your kingdom, although we are now fugitives from home!

Whether unjustly accused or not, the fact that Calvin was obliged to make such an apology for French evangelicals is an indication of just how widespread the perception of Protestants as rebels was among French Catholics. Though Calvin would never be able to convince Francis, or later his son Henry II, that his followers were not a threat to law and order in France, his *Institution of the Christian Religion* nevertheless became, after the Bible itself, the single most important influence on French Protestantism.

Despite the fact that it underwent numerous revisions, amendments, and reorganizations right through the final Latin edition published in 1559, the *Institution* did not really add to the corpus of Protestant theology in any significant way. That is to say, the principal Protestant doctrines of justification by faith, primacy of scripture, and the priesthood of all believers had all been enunciated in print by Luther as early as 1520. What Calvin did do, however, was offer a much fuller and more logical analysis of these doctrines than Luther – and doubtless his legalistic training was responsible – with the result that the *Institution* proved to be a much more effective handbook for educating and teaching than Luther's polemical treatises, particularly when a French translation of the original Latin was published in 1541. An example is Calvin's analysis of predestination, a doctrine closely tied to justification by faith and over which Luther and Erasmus had argued in print a decade earlier. Although just as fundamentally important to Lutheran doctrine as Calvin's, it was

the exposition of this doctrine in book 3, chapters 21–25 of the *Institution* that made it a hallmark of Protestant reform. What Luther had mentioned only in passing, though he understood it to be central to the doctrine of justification by faith, Calvin devoted nearly a hundred pages to explain: 'eternal election, by which God has predestined some to salvation, others to destruction'.

The really significant departures from Luther, however, were not theological but social: specifically in the practice and enforcement of doctrine. It may seem ironic that someone who was so determined to separate human actions and works on earth from eternal salvation – and this is really the gist of the doctrine of justification, grace, and predestination – was so completely absorbed with re-ordering the temporal world. Indeed, as his most recent biographer has pointed out, Calvin himself was convinced that he was called by God 'to set the world right . . . to bring the world to order'. 'Truly', Calvin noted, 'we ought to labour most for our own time and take it most into account. The future should not be overlooked, but what is present and urgent requires our attention more'.[15] Thus, one could say that the really distinguishing feature of Calvin – or rather, Calvinism – was the emphasis on social discipline.

Given the fact that Christianity itself was perceived by Protestants and Catholics alike as a community of believers rather than a body of beliefs, the attention to social discipline is hardly surprising. And it is clear from Calvin's writings in particular, that for him religion played the role of a 'bridle' in that community. God the creator naturally intended a certain order for His world, and it was Christianity which defined this order. Thus, for Calvin there was a real concern for the ordering of the temporal world which mankind could still affect, as opposed to the heavenly world, which God had already pre-ordained. In this context, a primary function of religion was to bridle the mind, the spirit, the will, the emotions, and above all the flesh. 'Each of us should watch himself closely', he argued, 'lest we be carried away by violent feeling'. Above all, we must 'bridle our affections before they become ungovernable'.[16] The Christian life was thus characterized by discipline and moderation: 'The life of the godly ought to be tempered with frugality and sobriety [so] that throughout its course a sort of perpetual fasting may appear'.[17] Thus, while Luther had emphasized the 'freedom of a Christian' (the title of one of his three 1520

[15] Quoted in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford, 1988), p. 191, a book to which I owe much for the paragraphs that follow (particularly chap. 5).

[16] Quoted in ibid., p. 88.

[17] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1960), I, 611 (book 3, chap 3, para. 17).

treatises), Calvin's emphasis was much more focused on the servitude and moral repression of a Christian.

But how was Calvin able to achieve this social discipline in Geneva, where he established his godly rule after 1541? Ironically, it was Calvin's subtle fusion of church and state – similar in principle to that of the pope in Rome and the monarchy in France, though very different in practice – that was to provide for the enforcement of social discipline in a godly community. Like nearly all sixteenth-century political thinkers Calvin was content to accept that the authority of the state (princes, magistrates, republics, etc.) came from God precisely to maintain God's order on earth. And he certainly did not

> disapprove of princes interposing their authority in ecclesiastical matters, provided it was done to preserve the order of the church, not to disrupt it; and to establish discipline, not to dissolve it. For since the church does not have the power to coerce, and ought not to seek it (I am speaking of civil coercion), it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments.[18]

For Calvin, then, the state not only had the right to intervene in spiritual matters, but it was its *duty* to do so.

> Civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behaviour to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility.[19]

And exactly how the state was supposed to carry out this responsibility was spelled out by Calvin when he drew up the charter of the Genevan church in September and October 1541, the so-called 'Draft ecclesiastical ordinances'.

Social discipline in Geneva after 1541 was thus effectively regulated by a group of a dozen elders, who according to the ordinances were to be selected by the three Genevan city councils who governed the city. The 'Little Council', the Council of Sixty, and Council of Two Hundred had only recently assumed civil authority of the city from the local Catholic bishop, and it was Calvin's success in convincing these magistrates of the benefits of their protection and participation in his church that enabled it to succeed. The main function of the elders, who were all appointed by the civil magistrates rather than the church, was 'to have oversight of the life of everyone, to admonish amicably those whom they see to be erring

[18] Ibid., II, 1228–19 (book 4, chap. 12, para. 16). Also see Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, pp. 204–13.

[19] Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 1487 (book 4, chap. 20, para. 2).

or to be living a disordered life, and, where it is required, to enjoin fraternal corrections'. The elders were to be selected from every quarter of the city and were supposed 'to keep an eye on everybody'.[20] The elders reported every week to the company of pastors of the church, and meeting as a consistory these representatives of church and state would interview each and every backslider, sinner, fornicator, adulterer, or law-breaker called before it to mete out the respective punishment. With the power to admonish and even excommunicate, the consistory acted as an effective policing agent in Geneva, to ensure that the bridle of religion was executing its function of social control. If certain repeat offenders required more serious punishment, the consistory could recommend that the secular magistrates impose fines, community service, bodily punishment, or ultimately even death. It was in Strasbourg during his stay there in the late 1530s that Calvin first learned of the effectiveness of the consistory from his friend Martin Bucer. And one historian has even called Bucer's *On the Kingdom of Christ*, rather than Calvin's *Institution*, 'the ur-text of Reformation *disciplina*'.[21] Though many of its critics considered the elders no more than 'peeping toms', the consistory did more than anything else to make Calvin's Geneva a very different place from Luther's Saxony. While both reformers had a very similar theology and even a similar vision of a more godly community, Calvin used the consistory to enforce social discipline in Geneva in a much more effective and regulated manner than elsewhere. The power of excommunication, not enjoyed in similar bodies in Strasbourg and Zurich, was inevitably what gave the consistory such power. And for all its critics, it was the success with which the consistory was able to enforce social order and discipline in Geneva, as much as its theology, that made this new religion so attractive to many.[22]

The point of this entire discussion of Calvin's ideas (and Calvinism in practice) is precisely that this particular form of Protestantism shared a vision of church and state that was entirely incompatible with that of most politically-minded French men and women. In France, the fusion of church and state was in the person of the monarch, who was bound by his office to protect the Catholic church. Indeed, because the Gallican king of France was the *Rex christianissimus*, his power and authority were defined and clarified by the very theology – particularly the powers of the

[20] 'Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances, September and October 1541' printed in John Dillenberger, ed., *John Calvin: Selections from his Writings* (Missoula, MT, 1975), p. 235.

[21] Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 180.

[22] A useful analysis of the consistory is in E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York, 1967) pp. 136–9.

priest in regard to the laity – that Protestantism so sharply criticized. In France the amalgamation of church and state thus had the effect of using the former to legitimate the latter, whereas in Geneva the effect was rather the opposite. Thus, for most Frenchmen one of the essential theological cornerstones of Calvinism appeared to jeopardize or at least to threaten the authority of the king of France. In the short run this meant that Calvinism became politicized when pastors were first dispatched into France in the 1550s as part of Calvin's evangelical campaign to spread the word. At least eighty-eight of them (and more likely many more) who had been trained in Geneva made efforts to organize Calvinist congregations in France from 1555 to 1562 alone. In the long run, however, it meant that either the Gallican monarchy or the reformed religion from Geneva would have to modify its essential make-up significantly if either was to accommodate the other. Despite its ready acceptance in other parts of Europe, the success of Calvinism in France would ultimately hinge on this basic fact.

The death of Francis I in 1547 and the succession of his son Henry II did not fundamentally alter the pattern of suppression of Protestants by the crown that had more or less existed since the 'Affair of the placards'. Nevertheless, the crown's position *vis-à-vis* the French Protestants became much more complex, while relations between the French monarchy and the papacy became more strained. The latter deteriorating relationship was largely the result of Pope Paul III's convocation of the Council of Trent in the final years of the reign of Francis I. The council, which was to meet off and on for the next eighteen years, was the high-water mark of the Catholic church in its efforts at first to try to resolve its differences with the Protestants in order to restore the unity of Christendom, and then eventually to reject outright all Protestant doctrine as heresy. Both Francis and Henry had suspected that the Holy See's sympathies toward the French in the Habsburg–Valois dispute in Italy had significantly shifted since the days of the Concordat of Bologna. And the selection of Trent, an imperial city, as the site of the council only confirmed their suspicions. Moreover, the king of France had no desire to participate in the amelioration of the religious troubles in Germany that were plaguing the emperor Charles V, as any distraction to the emperor, including heresy, worked to favour the French in their war against the Habsburgs. Thus, France had reacted coolly to the Council of Trent from the beginning when it opened in 1545. When Julius III succeeded Paul III as pope in 1549, however, French fears of a pro-Habsburg papacy became even more acute. The bull convening the first session of the council under the new pope in November 1550 was met with much more than indifference in France, as Henry II ordered all his bishops to

remain in their dioceses rather than journey to Trent and to begin making preparations for a French national council of the Gallican church, over which the king himself would preside. Moreover, Henry cut off the flow of annates to Rome, revenue the papacy had been entitled to ever since the Concordat of Bologna. When Julius III responded in kind by threatening to excommunicate and depose the king of France and replace him with the emperor's son, Prince Philip of Spain, relations between France and Rome reached a nadir and resembled the conflict between Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII two hundred and fifty years earlier. That dispute, of course, had fundamentally weakened ecclesiastical authority throughout Europe when the king of France, under a similar threat of excommunication, not only refused to back down but sent a French army to Italy in 1303 to kidnap Pope Boniface. It was in the midst of this 'Gallican crisis' in 1551 that anti-papal, pro-Gallican rhetoric reached its apex, including Jean du Tillet's 'On the liberties of the Gallican church' cited at the beginning of this chapter. With the recent defection of England, where the succession of Edward VI in 1547 only further undermined the Catholic church by formally adopting Protestant doctrine and a state church, further division could only weaken Catholic efforts to combat a growing Protestant menace throughout Christendom. And it was this argument that eventually forced a compromise with Rome, as both Henry and Julius backed down from their previous polemic. Henry agreed to postpone any meeting of a Gallican council, while the pope temporarily agreed to allow the king to continue collecting annates in France. Although a new schism was avoided, the 'Gallican crisis' of 1551 only further underscored the seriousness with which the king took his duties to defend the church in France, and that included protection from outside interference from Rome.[23]

But what were Henry's attitudes towards Protestantism in France? The creation immediately upon his succession of the *chambre ardente*, the special 'burning chamber' in the Parlement of Paris devoted exclusively to the prosecution of heresy, is clear evidence that he was a zealous pursuer of heretics. An analysis of the surviving records of this chamber, however, reveals a more complex situation. From May 1548 to March 1550, the only period for which records of this court have survived, the magistrates prosecuted a total of 323 persons for heresy. Of that number thirty-seven (11.5 per cent) were executed, with six of the thirty-seven

[23] For further analysis of this episode see Lucien Romier, *Les origines politiques des guerres de religion*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1913–14), I, 220–92; and Marc Venard, 'Une réforme gallicane? Le projet de concile national de 1551', *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France*, vol. 67 (1981), 201–21.

being burned as unrepentant heretics, and the other thirty-one receiving the less painful death by hanging for admitting and confessing their errors prior to execution. The other 286 individuals received punishments ranging from banishment and confiscation of property (6.5 per cent), beating (6.2 per cent), public penance (20.7 per cent), chastisement (9.6 per cent), fines (0.9 per cent), or were held over for further consideration (32.5 per cent) or actually acquitted and released without any punishment (12.1 per cent). The 11.5 per cent execution rate – or actually 17 per cent of those cases that received a final judgment – do mark a dramatic rise in executions from the six months immediately preceding the introduction of the *chambre ardente* in October 1547, when the Parlement of Paris executed only two of fifty-seven persons it prosecuted for heresy (3.5 per cent). This should not necessarily be interpreted solely as the result of the renewed zeal of Henry II, however repressive the new court might be. A special chamber of judges established only to hear heresy cases was always more likely to find and prosecute Protestants than the general criminal chamber called the *tournelle*, which had to deal with criminal cases of all types as well as heresy. This becomes clear in comparing the Parlement of Paris with the provincial courts. In the late 1540s, for example, the Parlement of Paris tried more than six times the number of heresy cases than the Parlement of Toulouse and meted out more than six times the number of death sentences for heresy.[24] Moreover, the growth of Protestantism in France since the days of the 'Affair of the placards' rather than the growth of the crown's zeal to prosecute them could also partly explain the rise in the number of cases in the early years of Henry II.

What the records of the *chambre ardente* show most clearly, however, is that Henry II associated the problem of heresy with the Catholic clergy. The occupations of 160 of the 323 defendants who were tried are recorded, and the pattern is a significant one. Artisans and small shopkeepers made up the largest number (37.5 per cent), followed by clergymen both regular and secular (34.4 per cent), merchants (10 per cent), royal officers (8.8 per cent), barristers and solicitors (5.6 per cent), and nobles (3.8 per cent).[25] At first glance it might appear that Henry's concern was primarily a social one to focus on the lower classes. But the artisans were significantly under-represented among the victims

[24] William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 136.

[25] Quoted in Jonathan Dewald, 'The "Perfect Magistrate": Parlementaires and Crime in Sixteenth-century Rouen', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 67 (1976), 298. Much of the preceding paragraphs is based on Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Henry II: King of France, 1547–1559* (Durham, NC, 1988), pp. 114–32.

compared to their proportion in the population at large, and no peasants were executed at all. On the other hand, the percentages of merchants, officers, and nobles executed compares favourably to their proportion in the population at large. The real victims of the *Chambre ardente* were the clergy, who made up fewer than five per cent of the population but more than a third of the total victims of Henry's repression. This does not take away from the king's general perception that heresy and rebellion went hand in hand, but it does suggest that Henry was not just focusing on heresy among the lower orders.

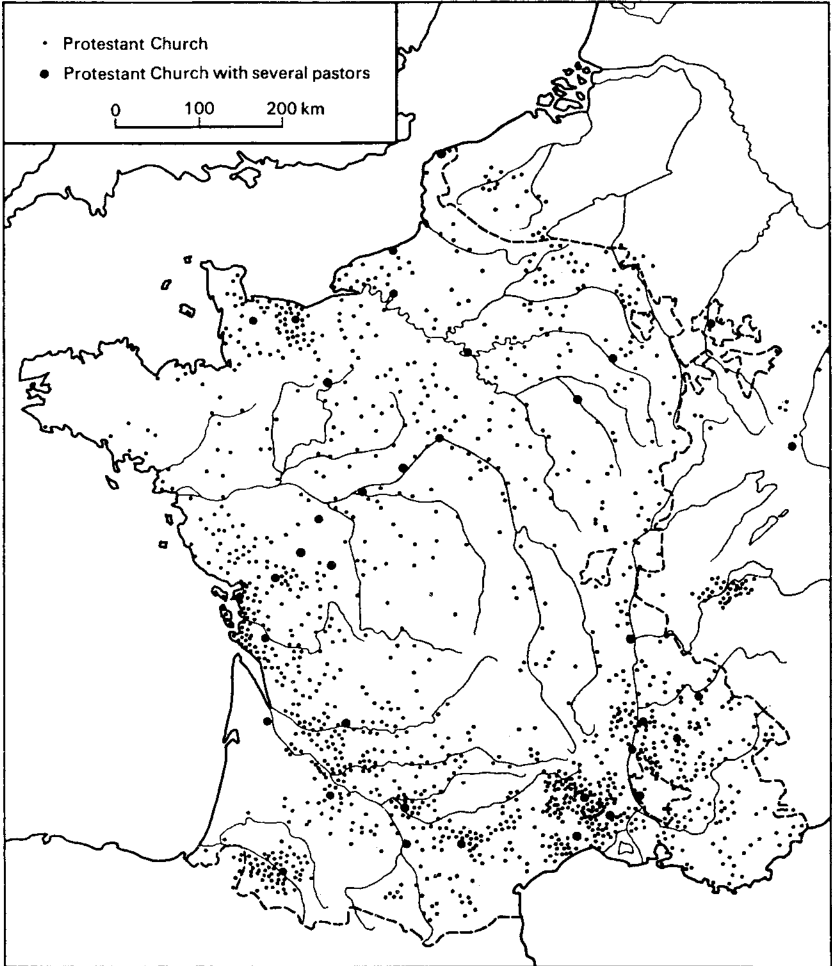
In the infamous edict of Châteaubriant of June 1551, where Henry enunciated a more comprehensive and legalistic ban on Protestantism with increased efforts to enforce it, the intention was to eradicate sedition and rebellion as much as heterodox opinion. To be sure, the edict did proscribe the printing, sale, and even possession of Protestant opinions, as well as outline in much greater detail the powers of censorship of the courts (articles 2–22). More significantly, however, the edict was concerned with illicit assemblies of heretics and spelled out incentives for would-be informers (articles 27–33). Any informer would receive one-third of the confiscated property of anyone he or she turned in. Moreover, any Protestant who attended an illicit assembly would be pardoned from similar offences if he or she became an informer. The edict not only prohibited anyone from harbouring or sheltering heretics, as had been the case since 1534, but magistrates were now given the power to seek them out, including the right to search private homes. With further clauses aimed at preventing Protestants from holding any public office but especially those in the sovereign courts (articles 23–24), or teaching in any school, academy, or university (articles 34–35), the emphasis on public order was clear. The king even required the Parlement of Paris to hold a special *mercuriale* every three months, so-called because it met on Wednesdays, in order to examine the magistrates themselves to see if any of them had fallen prey to heretical ideas (article 25). The main thrust of the edict was clearly spelled out in article 1, however, where the magistrates were commissioned to seek out those of 'the Lutheran heresy' as they were still incorrectly called, and 'to punish them as fomenters of sedition, schismatics, disturbers of public harmony and tranquility, rebels, and disobedient evaders of our ordinances and commandments'.[26] Under Henry II more than ever, Protestants were

[26] The edict is printed in Eugène and Emile Haag, *La France protestante*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1846–59), X, 17–29 (quote from article 1 on p. 19). A good summary of the edict, on which my own discussion is based, is N. M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 44–7.

perceived as dangerous threats to the social order, as fractious rebels who fomented sedition among the lower classes of society.

But were French Protestants on the eve of the Wars of Religion really from the lower classes as Henry II and other contemporaries believed? Many historians have thought so. The sociology and social geography of French Protestantism – Who were they? How many of them were there? And where did they live? – have always been important questions and the answers are by no means clear. Mark Greengrass has recently estimated that in the decade 1560–70, surely the high water-mark of their success, there were roughly 1,200 Protestant churches in France. Even allowing for a generous 1,500 communicating members for each congregation, and some were much larger than this, of course, at most Protestant strength would have reached about 1,800,000 members – or roughly 10 per cent of the total population of the kingdom.[27] And as Map 2 shows, these Protestants were by no means evenly distributed throughout the kingdom. While there were a number of Protestant churches north of the Loire, particularly in the province of Normandy, the bulk of them were located in the south in an arc-like distribution from La Rochelle on the Atlantic coast, down to Bordeaux and Toulouse, then over to Montpellier, and up to Lyon. This crescent of strength in Guyenne, Languedoc, Provence, and Dauphiné – that region usually called the Midi – played a significant role in the history of the Huguenots, as French Protestants came to be called in the religious wars. Moreover, it is equally clear from the map that there were also areas of France where Protestantism was peculiarly absent, particularly the border provinces of Burgundy, Champagne, Picardy, and Brittany. How is the historian to explain this 'fertile crescent' of Protestant strength in the Midi, as well as its relative absence elsewhere? Surely proximity to Geneva is not especially relevant, as Burgundy would have been among the first areas to be proselytized and Guyenne among the last. Nor does the cultural division between the *langue d'oc* (Occitan, where *oc* is the word for 'yes') in the south and the *langue d'oeuil* (French, where *oui* is the word for 'yes') in the north offer any better explanation, as Protestantism appealed mainly to those in the Midi who spoke French rather than Occitan. As historians have recently pointed out, hardly any effort was made to translate the scriptures or any of the Protestant liturgy into Occitan during this period, nor is there any evidence of preaching in the local dialect. The language and culture of Calvinism in France was clearly

[27] Greengrass, *French Reformation*, p. 43. Much of the discussion that follows is based on pp. 42–62 of this useful study.



Map 2 Protestant churches in 1562

French.[28] Nor was Protestantism especially attracted to those towns where there were printing presses. Lyon is one notable exception, of course, but for the most part the printing industry was located mainly in northern France rather than in the south. How, then, is the social geography of Protestantism in France to be explained?

[28] See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1966), I, 333–6; and Greengrass, *French Reformation*, p. 45.

Just because French Protestantism cannot be tied to Midi culture, does not necessarily mean that regional factors were entirely absent. Languedoc, for example, is a good case of a province where regional institutions managed to link Protestantism with its autonomous struggle with the crown for lower taxes and fewer fiscal demands. Languedoc was one of the *pays d'états*, those provinces which had the right to convoke provincial estates in order to assist the crown in the assessment and collection of royal taxes (Burgundy, Brittany, Dauphiné, and Provence were other *pays d'états*). And it is significant that in the 1550s and 1560s the estates of Languedoc – and particularly the third estate composed of bourgeois representatives from the towns, many of them sympathetic to Protestantism – made overt attempts to expropriate church land and clerical wealth to help meet their fiscal demands from the crown. Thus, in Languedoc regional autonomy and the Protestant Reformation came to be linked together when local bourgeois saw their own survival and that of the new religion going hand in hand. And as the Midi was an area where particularism and regional autonomy were especially strong, the social geography of French Protestantism becomes somewhat less murky.[29]

On the other hand, in Burgundy, another *pays d'état,* precisely the opposite occurred. In that province the provincial estates, the Parlement of Dijon, and the city councils of the major towns (Dijon, Beaune, Auxonne, among others) all came to perceive their regional identity as well as their future as tied to the traditional church rather than to Protestantism. Partly this was because the duchy of Burgundy had only recently been incorporated into the French crown in the late fifteenth century, and when the province promised its allegiance in 1479 to Louis XI after the assassination of Charles the Bold, it was upon the condition that the king would guard and protect the Catholic religion in the province. More importantly, a significant sector of the Burgundian economy was tied to the wine industry. Already in the sixteenth century the Côte-d'Or had a reputation for producing the best red wine in Europe. 'The wine of Beaune, reigns all alone', noted one authority.[30] And significantly, much of the land occupied by the vineyards either was owned or had ties to local

[29] Le Roy Ladurie, *Paysans de Languedoc*, I, 359–62; and for the background to this issue, see James E. Brink, 'Les états de Languedoc de 1515 à 1560: une autonomie en question', *Annales du Midi*, vol. 88 (1976), 287–305. The Reformation in the town of Montauban is a good case study of this process in action. See Philip Conner, *Huguenot Heartland: Montauban and Southern French Calvinism during the Wars of Religion* (Aldershot, 2002).

[30] Barthélemy de Chasseneux, *Catalogus gloriae mundi* (Lyon, 1546), p. 315: '*Vinum belnense, super omnia recense*.'

cathedrals, abbeys, and monasteries. Moreover, the winegrowers who pruned the vines tended to remain culturally tied to the Catholic church almost to a person because of the bonds of community, commensality, and sociability of their occupation. 'I am the vine and my Father is the wine-grower', stated Jesus in the gospels, 'I am the vine and you are the branches'.[31] That the fruit of their labour alone had been chosen by God to become Christ's blood, and then had become further elevated by being consumed only by priests during communion in the late Middle Ages, proved to be too great a cultural hurdle for Protestantism to overcome in Burgundy. Thus unlike in Languedoc, regional identity and autonomy came to be linked to traditional Christianity in Burgundy.[32] The cases demonstrated by these two provinces seem to suggest, moreover, that the social geography of French Protestantism hinged more on local factors and traditions than on any mono-causal determinant like language, literacy, or proximity to Geneva. This is not to suggest that these factors were not relevant. Clearly, a religion that stressed the Word was more likely to succeed where that Word could be both read and disseminated in print and heard by Geneva-trained pastors. The local context, however, especially how the local elites perceived the church in relation to their own situation, may ultimately have played a crucial role in determining the success or failure of Protestantism in any given region or province.

If the social geography of French Protestantism is problematical, the sociology of the movement is even more so. Though the new religion attracted converts from virtually all walks of life, countless historians have tried to link the success of French Protestantism with one particular social group or another. The fact remains that with 90 per cent of the population as a whole rejecting the new religion, a clear majority of *all* social groups remained Catholic. Nevertheless, ever since Karl Marx and Max Weber sparked off the debate nearly a century ago, historians have argued that the advent of Protestantism in the sixteenth century initiated a social as well as a religious reformation. Given the explicit fusion of 'religion and society' in the sixteenth century (see Introduction), this is hardly surprising. Henri Hauser was one of the first to take up the mantle of the social reformation at the turn of the twentieth century when he tied the cause of French Calvinism to the coat tails of the urban artisans and working classes: 'It was not solely against doctrinal corruptions and against ecclesiastical abuses, but also against misery and iniquity that the lower classes rebelled', he argued. 'They sought in the Bible not only for the doctrine of

[31] John 15: 1, 5.
[32] Mack P. Holt, 'Wine, Community and Reformation in Sixteenth-century Burgundy', *Past and Present*, no. 138 (February 1993), 58–93.

salvation by grace, but for proofs of the primitive equality of all men.'[33] A similar argument was taken up some thirty years later by Lucien Febvre between the two world wars. More subtle and persuasive than Hauser, Febvre argued for a rethinking of the French Reformation altogether and urged his colleagues to abandon traditional approaches which focused on specificity (whether the French Reformation was unique), dating (whether it pre-dated Luther), and nationality (whether French Protestantism was a nationalist movement). More important, he argued, were the social forces of Protestantism, and specifically the question of which social groups were most attracted to it. Febvre looked beyond Hauser's urban artisans and higher up the social ladder to embrace merchants, the magistracy, and officers of the crown, in short, the *bourgeoisie,* social groups which turned to Protestantism as a result of their search for 'a religion more suited to their new needs, more in agreement with their changed conditions of their social life'. In a *tour de force* of historical argument, Febvre went on to analyse why these middle classes found Calvinism so attractive:

> The whole of the merchant bourgeoisie, which untiringly engaged in trade over the highways and vast seas of the world . . . that bourgeoisie composed of lawyers and officers of the Crown . . . in short, all those who in exercising precise trades and minute techniques developed within themselves a temperament inclined to seek practical solutions . . . all had equal need of a clear, reasonably human and gently fraternal religion which would serve as their light support.

Thus Febvre's social foundation of the Reformation was a far cry from Hauser's urban proletariat composed of 'mechanics'. His view was that in a period of economic change and social flux such as the sixteenth century, it was only 'the best, noblest and liveliest minds who endeavoured to make the tremendous effort required to fashion for themselves a faith adapted to their needs'.[34]

During the past three decades, however, historians interested in the social history of the Reformation have managed to go far beyond these older approaches of Hauser and Febvre. A more sophisticated quantitative approach to the subject based on unpublished material in local archives has allowed Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Davis, Philip

[33] Henri Hauser, 'The French Reformation and the French People in the Sixteenth Century', *American Historical Review*, vol. 4 (1899), 217–27; and in French as 'La Réforme et les classes populaires en France au XVIe siècle', in his *Etudes sur la Réforme française* (Paris, 1909), pp. 83–103.

[34] Lucien Febvre, 'The Origins of the French Reformation: A Badly-put Question', in his *A New Kind of History and other Essays*, ed. Peter Burke (New York, 1973), pp. 44–107; original French edition, 'Une question mal posée: les origines de la Réforme française', *Revue historique*, vol. 161 (1929), 1–73.

Benedict, and David Rosenberg among others, to replace the rather impressionistic explanations of Hauser and Febvre with analyses supported by precise statistical data of the social make-up of the Huguenot movement and how it compared to society as a whole. And though local and regional variations must be weighed carefully, we simply now know a great deal more about why Protestantism was so successful in France in the mid-sixteenth century, who was attracted to it, and why. It is clear, for example, that in its initial stages French Protestantism was largely an urban movement composed of adherents who, for the most part, were literate. It is no coincidence that in Montpellier, for example, on a list of Huguenots in 1560 nearly 85 per cent of those whose professions were recorded were either artisans or learned professionals, while fewer than 5 per cent were peasants, day-labourers, or farmers. In the same city illiteracy was low among artisans (26 per cent) and high among peasants (72 per cent). In a religion that put so much emphasis on the primacy of scripture it is hardly surprising that it would draw its initial strength from among those best able to interpret the printed gospel.[35]

Moreover, certain trades and professions seemed to provide a disproportionate number of converts to the new religion. These included not only those trades in which literacy was an essential skill and which were also important for the propagation of the new religion (printers, booksellers, etc.), but also a number of vocations which were both highly skilled and in which there was some novelty. Natalie Davis has described the sociology of Protestantism in Lyon, where trades involving new technology (printers), new claims for prestige (painters, jewelers, goldsmiths), and recent establishment in the city (manufacturers and finishers of silk cloth) were all overrepresented in the Lyonnais Protestant movement in the 1560s. Members from virtually all social and economic levels within those particular vocations were attracted to the new religion, while very few members of any status of older and less skilled trades (such as butchers, bakers, vintners, etc.) became Protestants. Philip Benedict's data from Rouen tend to support Davis's findings in Lyon: well-educated and high status artisans were overrepresented in the Protestant movement of that city, while more traditional and lower status trades – the food and drink trades and textile trades, particularly weavers – tended to be underrepresented compared to their proportions in Rouen as a whole. Apart from the very wealthiest and most destitute, every social rank in the city was represented in the Protestant movement; but as in Lyon, they were generally drawn from those professions where 'the degree of literacy,

[35] Le Roy Ladurie, *Paysans de Languedoc*, I, 343–5.

self-confidence, and personal independence needed to reject the tutelage of the clergy and embrace the idea of a priesthood of all believers' was already important. Thus, with a far greater degree of sophistication and persuasion, recent social historians have echoed the view of Lucien Febvre that French Protestantism was initially at least a movement of 'the literate and self-assertive'.[36]

The problem of local and regional variation is significant, however, because historians of other parts of France have argued that Protestantism in Montpellier, Lyon, and Rouen is not necessarily representative of the movement as a whole. Indeed, in various cities throughout the kingdom, especially Amiens, it has been argued that Protestantism was hardly a movement of the independent, self-assertive, and literate middle classes, but a movement of the frustrated, exploited, and economically oppressed. David Rosenberg has demonstrated that in Amiens the bedrock of Protestantism was the city's textile workers, especially the woolcombers and weavers, 'a relatively disadvantaged section of the population from an economic standpoint'. These textile workers were not especially literate compared to other artisans in the city and were certainly neither independent nor self-assertive, with the power of the cloth merchants virtually controlling their livelihood. Above all, the precariousness of their economic position was nothing like the more prosperous printworkers in Lyon or merchants and artisans of Rouen. Concerning the Protestant weavers of Amiens, 'one is left with the impression not only of poverty, but of a precarious kind of poverty, which a small reversal of fortune might quickly convert into destitution'. With a quantitative sophistication that is entirely convincing, Rosenberg has thus turned the Protestantism of Le Roy Ladurie, Davis, Benedict, and ultimately Febvre on its head, and has produced a movement that more clearly resembles the proletarian mechanics of Henri Hauser.[37]

[36] Natalie Davis, 'Strikes and Salvation at Lyon', in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), pp. 1–16; and Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 71–94. Also see Timothy Watson, 'Preaching, Printing, Psalm Singing: The Making and Unmaking of the Reformed Church in Lyon, 1550–1572', in Raymond A. Mentzer and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559–1685* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 10–28.

[37] David L. Rosenberg, 'Social Experience and Religious Choice, a Case Study: The Protestant Weavers and Woolcombers of Amiens in the Sixteenth Century', unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1978, chap. 2, esp. pp. 74–5. A more recent study based on research in seven provincial cities, though one without the quantitative sophistication of Rosenberg's work, has echoed his main argument that the French Reformation was a reaction by the journeymen and poorer craftsmen to a decline in living standards, economic difficulty, and fiscal oppression. See Henry Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth-century France* (Leiden, 1986), esp. p. 234.

What are we to make of all this? Simply that local social and cultural variables could produce a variety of different contexts which were conducive to the growth of Protestantism? For one thing, sixteenth-century Amiens was a very different place from Lyon and Rouen, the former being a textile centre where the clear bulk of *all* artisans worked in the textile trades. Both absolutely and proportionately, the numbers of printers, goldsmiths, tanners, and booksellers in Amiens was significantly smaller than in either Lyon or Rouen, the two largest cities in France outside Paris. On the other hand, the textile industry was relatively new to Amiens, only becoming fully established in the late fifteenth century. And as a result, most of the woolcombers and weavers who turned to Protestantism there – perhaps as many as 90 per cent – were first generation textile workers, plying their skills in a different trade from their fathers. In this respect, they had more in common with the more prosperous printers and silkworkers in Lyon than is at first apparent. It was the particular social context in which the Amiens textile workers existed that is at the root of their overwhelming support of the new religion. Due to the size and importance of their profession to the local economy, local authorities did not allow them to follow the normal path of corporate organization and control practised by other craftsmen in the city. The textile workers thus did not enjoy the autonomy to regulate themselves or the same corporate identity common to other artisans in Amiens, and as a result, sought for such an identity and means of hegemony in the reformed religion.[38] The point to be underscored here is that though there may be some social and cultural determinants concerning confessional choice among the various Protestant communities throughout France in the 1550s and 1560s, each of the social environments in which it succeeded needs to be analysed carefully. Dijon, for example, the capital of the province of Burgundy, had a large, prosperous, and literate artisanate. It was close to Geneva, as well as being in the traffic and communication routes between Paris and Lyon. It also had a large group of merchants, lawyers, and royal officers. In short, it was just the sort of town like Lyon and Rouen where Protestantism might be expected to thrive.[39] As already indicated, however, the reform movement failed to take hold in Burgundy because of the region's winegrowers and the orientation of the province's elites. Thus, each social context must be examined in detail before one can assess why the Reformation succeeded

[38] Rosenberg, 'Social Experience and Religious Choice', pp. 66–7, 156–63, and 189–202.

[39] On the religious and social make-up of Dijon, see James R. Farr, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and their World in Dijon, 1550–1650* (Ithaca, NY, 1988).

or failed. And recent historians have demonstrated how this approach can be far more illuminating than economic reductionism.

Although the earliest converts and even the bulk of the Huguenots may have been made up of journeymen artisans, master craftsmen, merchants, lawyers, and royal officials in some combination in every Protestant community in France, the movement as a whole would doubtless never have survived the crown's attempt to root out heresy during the reign of Henry II without the support of a significant number of elites: primarily members of the nobility, and particularly those with the ability to offer protection. The period from 1555 until the outbreak of the Wars of Religion in 1562 witnessed the recruitment of a number of nobles to the cause that proved to be a godsend for the future of the movement. This was no accident, as Calvin's evangelical ministry in France began in 1555 with the aim of attracting aristocratic support. Of those ministers sent into France from Geneva between 1555 and 1562 whose social status can be identified, nearly one-third were themselves noble. And foremost among the many nobles who joined the Protestant movement in that period, despite the serious consequences of opposing the policy of the king, were several influential members of the Bourbon family, who were themselves of royal blood and directly related to the ruling Valois dynasty. Antoine de Bourbon, king of Navarre, had extensive seigneurial holdings in and around Béarn in southwest France, and it is hardly a coincidence that the southwest – Béarn, Gascony, and Guyenne – was an area where Calvin enjoyed his clearest success in establishing Protestant congregations. Sixteen of the first eighty-eight ministers Calvin dispatched to France (nearly one-fifth) were sent to this area. Calvin made an especially explicit attempt to befriend the king of Navarre, in light of his importance, and began a lengthy correspondence with him in 1557 to that effect. 'If men of low condition', Calvin wrote him in December 1557, 'can sacrifice themselves so that God may be purely worshiped, the great should do all the more. God, who has pulled you from the shadows of superstition . . . and illumined your understanding of the Gospel, which is not given to all, does not want this light hidden, but rather wishes you to be a burning lamp to lighten the way of great and small.' Although Navarre was forever to remain a waverer, sympathetic but never firmly and publicly committed to the new religion, his wife Jeanne proved to be the 'burning lamp' that Calvin had in mind. As the daughter of Francis I's sister Marguerite of Angoulême by her second husband, Jeanne d'Albret was queen of Navarre. She had been reared at her mother's court when Lefèvre d'Etaples, Roussel, Farel, and others from the Meaux circle were being sheltered there. And although many historians have assumed that it was Antoine de Bourbon who converted his wife to Protestantism,

Nancy Roelker has convincingly proved that it most likely was the other way round. Even though she did not formally announce her conversion until Christmas Day 1560, it is clear that she favoured reform long before her husband displayed any sympathies for it. In a letter written from Pau in December 1555, these Protestant feelings were self-evident:

> I well remember how long ago, the late King [of Navarre], my most honored father . . . surprised the said Queen [Marguerite of Angoulême] when she was praying in her rooms with the ministers Roussel and Farel, and how with great annoyance he slapped her right cheek and forbade her sharply to meddle in matters of doctrine. He shook a stick at me which cost me many bitter tears and has kept me fearful and compliant until after they had both died. Now that I am freed by the death of my said father two months ago . . . a reform seems so right and so necessary that, for my part, I consider that it would be disloyalty and cowardice to God, to my conscience and to my people to remain any longer in a state of suspense and indecision.

Jeanne d'Albret, queen of Navarre would come to play a pivotal role in the future of the Protestant movement in France in the ensuing decade and a half of her life. What Calvin ultimately lost in her wavering husband, he more than made up for in the unqualified support of this French noblewoman. She and other noblewomen like her, moreover, were unusually active in the movement and helped to sustain it during this crisis period of persecution on the eve of the religious wars.[40]

Among other noble converts in this period was Louis de Bourbon, prince of Condé, Antoine's younger brother. In October 1555 on his return from a military campaign in Italy, he visited Geneva where he attended Calvinist sermons and asked to be shown around the city. Although there is no surviving evidence that he saw Calvin or any other Genevan pastor during this short visit, Condé's ardor for the new faith dated from this period and stood him in marked contrast with the king of Navarre's more distant commitment to the religion. The younger Bourbon not only promised 'mountains and marvels' in the way of princely protection and patronage of the Huguenots in France, but he requested the services of a Calvinist pastor as early as 1558 in order to underscore his public and formal commitment to the reformed religion. Moreover, when Navarre died at the outset of the religious wars, it was Condé who assumed the mantle of military leadership of the Huguenots in their struggle for recognition by the crown. It was he to whom Calvin

[40] Nancy L. Roelker, *Queen of Navarre: Jeanne d'Albret, 1528–1572* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), letter from Calvin to Navarre quoted on p. 130, letter from Jeanne quoted on p. 127. Also see Roelker's 'The Role of Noblewomen in the French Reformation', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 63 (1972), 168–94.

and all French Protestants would look for leadership in the 1560s.[41] Other prominent noble converts included the three Châtillon brothers, nephews of the Constable of France, Anne de Montmorency. Constable Montmorency was *de facto* head of the French military and a loyal and well-rewarded client of Henry II. Although he remained Catholic, his three nephews converted to Calvinism early on with a helping hand from a pastor from Geneva. Gaspard de Coligny had won the office of admiral as the result of his uncle's position at court and also had extensive land holdings in Normandy. Thus, as was the case in Béarn and Navarre in the southwest, Normandy became a stronghold of Protestantism because of the degree of aristocratic protection. The other two brothers, François d'Andelot and Odet de Châtillon, though perhaps ultimately less significant in the Protestant movement, displayed no less zeal. In any case, the Bourbons and the Châtillons were only the tip of the iceberg of noble converts who provided French Protestantism with both legitimacy and protection in the period 1555–62. Moreover, these nobles enabled the movement to spread to the countryside in areas of Normandy and the southwest where it could be protected and guarded from royal prosecution. It was thus no longer exclusively an urban movement of artisans and merchants. It is true that some of these nobles were attracted to Calvinism for political or personal gain rather than for its theology; but that was also true for the masses as well. And for every Antoine de Bourbon there was a Gaspard de Coligny, whose sympathies for the new religion were genuine. Above all, with a significant number of nobles among their numbers including some influential at court, the French Protestant movement was able to survive whatever the motives of its aristocratic leadership.

Moreover, there was one small but worrisome faction of elites who were converting to the new religion that clearly posed a threat to the social and political order: the judges in the sovereign courts of the parlements. As Henry II had already made a concerted effort to increase the powers of the royal courts to prosecute heresy among the masses, that effort was jeopardized if some of the judges themselves were tainted with heresy and less than fully committed to the eradication of Protestantism. The king's fears were not without foundation, as there was a small minority of Protestant sympathizers among the magistrates in the Parlement of Paris as well as in most of the provincial parlements. The most notorious was Anne du Bourg, a vocal Protestant magistrate who in June 1559 had the temerity to insult Henry II when the king made a personal visit to the Parlement of Paris. He and six of his colleagues were arrested and charged

41 Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religon in France, 1555–1563* (Geneva, 1956), p. 59; and Sutherland, *Huguenot Struggle*, p. 71

with heresy. The other six soon recanted and were eventually released, but Du Bourg stood firm and remained in prison. He sealed his own fate when from prison he wrote a treasonous pamphlet which suggested that no French subject was required to recognize the legitimacy of a monarch who contravened the will of God. Even Calvin had refrained from going that far, and it was no surprise to most Parisians when Du Bourg was soon thereafter burned at the stake not just for heresy but, significantly, for sedition and *lèse-majesté*. Though Anne du Bourg became a martyr to the Protestant cause, his execution was intended as an example for his colleagues on the court. How many other Protestant sympathizers were there within the Parlement of Paris? It is impossible to say with any precision, but it is revealing that when every member of the court was required to make a public profession of faith as a Catholic in June 1562, 31 of the 143 members of the court (6 presidents and 137 counselors) absented themselves: more than a fifth of the court's membership.[42] Not all of the absentees were bonafide Protestants, to be sure; several were out of town, some even on the crown's business. Nevertheless, even though the Parlement of Paris was quick to root out heresy from its own ranks, the ceremonial of the profession of faith demonstrated that there was hardly unanimity among the king's own magistrates on how that should be achieved. While the clear majority of all judges in the parlements were loyal Catholics and as anxious as the king to purify the kingdom of the pollution of heresy and rebellion, the spectre of more Anne du Bourgs continued to haunt the last years of the reign of Henry II.[43]

The king's reign was cut short in July 1559, however, when he died of a head wound suffered in a jousting accident. The tragedy occurred during the celebration of the recently concluded peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis ending the Habsburg–Valois wars in Italy and the accompanying marriage alliance between Spain and France (with Henry II's daughter Elisabeth marrying Philip II of Spain). Henry had inherited both the war against the Habsburgs in Italy and the domestic struggle against Protestantism from his father. And while military defeat and financial exigency had forced him into a compromise peace with Philip II in April 1559, the war against the Huguenots had only escalated during his reign. Despite the increased suppression of the new religion in France since the Edict of Châteaubriant in 1551, Protestant strength had

[42] Linda C. Taber, 'Royal Policy and Religious Dissent within the Parlement of Paris, 1559–1563', unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1982, esp. pp. 265–71.

[43] For an example of the overwhelming Catholic sympathies of most magistrates in the parlements, as well as an indication of their zeal to extirpate Protestantism, see Jonathan Powis, 'Order, Religion, and the Magistrates of a Provincial Parlement in Sixteenth-century France', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 71 (1980), 180–96.

increased during the latter years of Henry's reign because of the stepped-up evangelical effort from Geneva. With the king's life cut so tragically short in the summer of 1559, the religious situation was exacerbated by the power struggle at court that ensued among the various noble factions struggling to dominate Henry's eldest son, the fifteen year-old Francis II. Moreover, the Huguenots had little reason to think that the crown's policy of persecution under his father and grandfather would be any better under Francis II, as the young king had only recently been married to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, a niece of the most militantly Catholic family in France: the Guise family from Lorraine. Mary's mother was a sister of Francis, duke of Guise, and Charles, cardinal of Lorraine. The former was not only a powerful noble in his own right but also one of the most ardent defenders of the Catholic faith and persecutors of heresy in all of France; while the latter was probably the wealthiest and most influential cleric in the entire realm. As the Guises managed to take over control of the governmental administration within days of Henry II's death – including the royal *cachet,* the church, the military, the diplomatic corps, as well as the royal treasury – the accidental death of Henry II was an ominous portent for the continuation of the suppression and persecution of Protestantism in the summer of 1559.

The domination of the young king by his uncles, the Guises, did not go unchallenged, as there were many who sought to contest their authority. There was the king's own mother and Henry II's widow for one, Catherine de Medici. While her own Catholicism was never in doubt, she was left to rear four young sons alone and only wanted what was best for them, especially for the eldest, Francis II. And in her view, the domination of the crown by the Guises was hardly conducive to a strong and independent reign. The Queen Mother (as the widowed Catherine de Medici came to be called after her husband's death) was a pragmatic woman; and though she had many faults, looking after the best interests of her children was not among them. Unfortunately, she quickly discovered that Francis seemed to take his uncles' advice much more seriously than her own, and she found herself at a loss over how to weaken the influence of the Guises over her eldest son.

Other opponents of the Guises naturally included Antoine de Bourbon, king of Navarre, and Louis de Bourbon, prince of Condé. As Protestants their interests could hardly have been more jeopardized by the rise to power at court of the Guises. Because of the influence of the duke of Guise in the military and the cardinal of Lorraine in the Gallican church, it appeared that the royal policy of the suppression of Protestantism would only continue. Some Protestants even suggested that because Francis II was not yet twenty-one years of age that he was technically a minor and that a regent should be appointed to govern until he reached

his age of majority. Naturally, they looked to the king of Navarre as first prince of the blood to fulfill that role. This was only a Protestant view, however. Though this issue was not explicitly spelled out in fundamental law, most politically minded Frenchmen had traditionally assumed the age of majority to begin in a king's fourteenth year (i.e., on his thirteenth birthday). Moreover, even if a regency government was required, there was no custom or tradition that required the first prince of the blood to become regent. The last time there had been a need for such a regency government after the death of Louis XI in 1483, the first prince of the blood was bypassed altogether in favour of someone else. Thus, most French men and women readily accepted the new king as legitimate and of age, fully capable of administering his kingdom and appointing his advisors according to his pleasure.[44] Jean de la Vacquerie, a doctor of the Sorbonne, represented the views of many when he cautioned the new king to take seriously the oath to safeguard the Catholic church that he had recently sworn in his coronation *sacre*:

> Other than God we could not choose a more competent or better judge than the Most Christian King for the defence and propagation of the Christian faith and religion. Since he is the Most Christian King, he has the zeal to guard God's honour; and since he is a virtuous and powerful king, he will not allow the Catholic church in his kingdom to be wrongly oppressed and afflicted. From the very day of his coronation and the possession of his kingdom, he swore and promised God that he would faithfully protect the Christian faith.[45]

As it happened, Antoine de Bourbon, king of Navarre, was neither ready nor willing to assume the mantle of Protestant leadership in order to challenge the authority of the Guises at court, and he remained secluded in Guyenne during the months following Henry II's death. His younger brother, the prince of Condé, however, was much less ambivalent about the religious and political situation and very soon decided to force the issue of the Guise domination of the new king. The politicization of French Calvinism had thus become complete, as the religious issue became thoroughly immersed in the political struggle at court between the Guises on the one hand and the Bourbons and the Châtillons on the other.

[44] See the sentiments in the anonymously written pamphlet, *Pour la majorite du Roy treschrestien contre les escrites des rebelles* (Paris: Guillaume Morel, 1560), unpaginated, fol. Clv.

[45] Jean de la Vacquerie, *Catholique remonstrance aux Roys et princes Chrestiens, a tous magistrats & gouverneurs de repub [liques] touchant l'abolition des heresies, troubles & scismes qui regnant auiourd'huy en la Chrestienté* (Paris: Claude Fremy, 1560), p. 5r.

What became called the 'conspiracy of Amboise' in March 1560 was an overt Protestant attempt to liberate the young Francis II from Guise influence as the court wintered at the royal château at Amboise along the Loire. With the backing of several hundred armed nobles from the provinces, the organizer of the plot, Jean du Barry, seigneur de la Renaudie, hoped to kidnap the king in order to free him from Guise influence. La Renaudie had been in contact with both Condé and Geneva, and while the Bourbon prince clearly endorsed the plot, Calvin had more prudently kept his distance and urged the conspirators not to confront the king physically. Plans of the impending attack on the court somehow leaked, moreover, and the plot backfired. As the conspirators began to assemble near Amboise in early March 1560, they were surprised by royal troops under orders of the duke of Guise, and several hundred of those Protestants captured were summarily executed as rebels and traitors and hanged from the walls of the château. The failed conspiracy not only put paid to whatever plans the Huguenots may have had of ending the Guise domination of the crown, but it only further reinforced Catholic perceptions that they were primarily seditious rebels who aimed to overthrow the state. The same Jean de la Vacquerie of the Sorbonne exhorted that 'heresy is a crime, the most dangerous and stinking crime there is in a city or commonwealth'. He insisted that 'religion is the primary and principal foundation of all order, and the bourgeois and citizens are more bound together and united by it than by their trade in merchandise, the communication of laws, or anything else in a civil society . . . and that there is never more trouble or a greater tempest in a commonwealth than when there is some schism or dissension concerning the issue of religion there'. La Vacquerie spelled out his fears of the consequences of sedition very clearly. The Huguenots 'have always been the mortal enemies of kings and great nobles . . . and by their false doctrines they have often incited their subjects to rebel against them, and to forsake the obedience, the recognition, and even the respect they owe to their masters and seigneurs'. His message was clear: these seditious rebels must be rooted out before all of France became infested with rebellion and revolution.[46] And though this might be just the sort of rhetoric to be expected from a doctor of the Sorbonne, somewhat similar sentiments were evident from more moderate voices. Jacques de Silly, seigneur de Rochefort, was a gentleman of the king's bedchamber and less militantly Catholic than

[46] Ibid., pp. 23r–v and 30r.

La Vacquerie. His published harangue of the following year also spelled out the same exhortation for public order:

> The three things that kings ought to desire most are religion for the clarity of their consciences, the nobility to defend them with arms, and justice for the conservation of their subjects. So, if we employ them together, each according to the purpose for which God has ordained it . . . we shall strengthen this body of France and we shall see it flourish more than ever, provided that by your [i.e., the king's] rule you remove the causes of sedition from us.

'Peace and public tranquility are the strongest walls in the world', he concluded, 'they are the sinews of the prince'.[47]

And in order to make a public demonstration that they were keeping the peace, the Guises not only had several hundred of the conspirators executed, but they also ordered the arrest of the prince of Condé, who although absent from Amboise was clearly implicated in the plot. His own martyrdom would have quickly followed, in fact, had not the young Francis II suddenly died from an ear abscess in December 1560 while Condé was awaiting execution. Just as suddenly as they had been elevated to power in July 1559 with one royal death, so the Guises found themselves dismissed with another only eighteen months later when Francis was succeeded by his younger brother Charles IX. Because the new king was only eleven years old, a regency government was required after all. Seizing the initiative herself this time, Catherine de Medici declared herself the regent for her son Charles, dismissed the Guises from power at court, released Condé from prison, and ultimately hoped to steer an independent course for the new king, free from domination by all factions. Was this possible, however, in light of the escalating religious tensions in France? Above all, could this be achieved in light of the crisis of authority at court, now exacerbated by an under-age king on the throne?

It became immediately clear that the Queen Mother's policy would be one of moderation in light of the extremist positions of Protestants and Catholics alike in recent months. She had little time for either the Guises or the conspirators at Amboise, and ultimately she hoped to restore order and eradicate violence on both sides. She did hope this could be achieved without damaging the unity of the Gallican church, to be sure, but peace and the future of her son's kingdom were what ultimately mattered most. Her regime's new direction, so distinct from the Guise-dominated reign of Francis II, was evident by her appointment of the king of Navarre as the

[47] Jacques de Silly, seigneur de Rochefort, *La Harangue de par la Noblesse de toute la France au Roy tres-chrestien* (Paris: Charles Perier, 1561), p. 13v.

lieutenant-general of the realm, recognizing his position as first prince of the blood. After the constable, Anne de Montmorency, Navarre was thus second in command of the royal army as lieutenant-general. No further sign of the fall from grace of the Guises was necessary after the appointment of Navarre. Moreover, Catherine found other moderates on the royal council more to her liking and began listening to them for advice on policy. Foremost among them was the chancellor, Michel de l'Hôpital, a moderate voice who urged that all sides put down their arms in order to decide the religious question peacefully. L'Hôpital was a former councillor in the Parlement of Paris and a man of law by background. As chancellor he was the king's advocate in the Parlement and carried some weight in that conservative body. Also more prominent on the royal council under the Queen Mother's regency was Gaspard de Coligny, a moderate Protestant who had condemned the plot at Amboise and had wisely distanced himself from it from the start. Thus, for the first time since the persecution began following the 'Affair of the placards' more than twenty-five years earlier, French Protestants had some reason to believe that the crown itself might at last be wavering in its suppression of the new religion. Although two separate meetings of the Estates-General at Orléans in December 1560 and Pontoise in August 1561 had failed to resolve the religious dispute, Catherine soldiered on. (The Estates-General were meetings of selected representatives from all over France from the traditional three estates of the realm – the clergy, nobility, and bourgeois elites from the towns – convoked by the crown in times of crisis or emergency, such as during the minority of a king.)

The result was an attempt to mediate the religious dispute by discussion and compromise when Catherine de Medici invited leaders from both sides (she even extended invitations to Calvin and Beza to come from Geneva) to come to Poissy in September 1561 to see if there was any way possible to re-unite all Frenchmen together under the Gallican church. The resulting colloquy of Poissy ultimately failed, as neither side was willing to compromise with the other. On both theological, and social and political issues, each side's perception of the other had become too hardened over the preceding years to compromise. The real legacy of the colloquy of Poissy, however, was not the Queen Mother's failure to bring about reconciliation, but rather the heightened fear among militant Catholics that she might be willing to compromise with the Huguenots. Each passing month since the death of Francis II had only underscored that fear, and many began to wonder if a Catholic plot to liberate the new king from his 'captors' was now required. When Francis, duke of Guise, along with the constable, Anne de Montmorency, and an army marshall, the sieur de St-André, formed a military 'triumvirate' in late 1561 to seek

aid from Philip II of Spain in order to drive out all Protestants from France, a Catholic conspiracy of Amboise was a distinct possibility. And that the triumvirs threatened civil war was clearly stated in their published goals: not only 'to extirpate all those of the new religion', but also 'to obliterate completely the name of the family and race of the Bourbons'.[48]

The Guises' worst fears came to pass in January 1562 when Catherine issued the Edict of Saint-Germain proclaiming the limited but legal recognition of the Huguenots. Usually referred to as the 'Edict of January' or the 'edict of toleration', this edict was the first public and formal recognition that the French crown had ever given the Huguenots to practise their religion without interference. As a result, it marked a watershed in the crown's position on religion and was decidedly the result of Catherine de Medici's attempts to mediate a religious settlement without civil war. The preamble of the edict made it very clear that her purpose was 'to appease the troubles and seditions over the issue of religion'. It was a very narrow and limited recognition of the Protestants' right to exist, however, forbidding them to practise or worship inside all towns, to assemble anywhere at night, and to raise arms. But for the first time in their short history in France, they were now allowed to preach openly in the countryside by day as long as they did so peacefully. Moreover, unlike the restrictions placed on townspeople, the edict allowed Protestant nobles to organize and protect Calvinist congregations on their own rural estates. Catherine made it clear that all mobilization of arms and sedition would be dealt with harshly, but the Huguenots could now at last meet openly and peacefully.[49] This was a *volte-face* that most Catholics found difficult to swallow. Even though Charles IX was still a minor and had not yet taken his solemn and sacred oath to safeguard the Catholic church, it was clearly understood that the edict of Saint-Germain was a radical departure from the past.

Among the first to react against the edict were the conservative magistrates of the Parlement of Paris, who at first refused to register it as they were required by law to do. They issued a formal remonstrance to the Queen Mother, hoping she would withdraw the edict or at least alter it so that the crown could not be accused of harbouring heretics in the kingdom. Their theme was clear from the title page of the published

[48] *Sommaire des choses premièrement accordées entre les ducs de Montmorency connestable, et de Guyse grand maistre, pairs de France, et le mareschal Sainct André, pour la conspiration du triumvirat* . . . [1561], printed in N. M. Sutherland, *The Massacre of St Bartholomew and the European Conflict, 1559–1572* (London, 1973), pp. 347–50 (quote on p. 349).

[49] The edict is printed in Haag and Haag, *La France protestante*, X, 48–52, and is ably summarized in Sutherland, *Huguenot Struggle*, pp. 354–5.

remonstrance sent to her, with St. Matthew 12:25 printed beneath the title: 'Every kingdom divided against itself goes to ruin.' The judges underscored their perception of the Huguenots as a threat to the social and political order, calling them 'indigents collected from all parts, mixed together with criminals, thieves, and trouble-makers . . . who live and pillage under the pretext of religion'. The king's responsibility to the Catholic church was their principal theme. The young Charles IX, 'just like all his predecessors in his *sacre* and coronation', would soon make his solemn oath to drive heresy out of his kingdom, 'which obligates him to God and his subjects who owe him obedience. For Him and for them, keeping the oaths made in his *sacre* is his reciprocal duty. And to allow or tolerate diverse religions in this kingdom is clearly a far cry from his promise to exterminate heresy altogether.' The magistrates further complained of the edict's explicit departure from tradition. 'The king has more occasion than any other Christian prince to maintain the traditional religion in which his predecessors have prospered from king Clovis up until the present, which is more than a thousand years.' They concluded by appealing to the law, and especially to the patriarchal hierarchy which protected religious unity. With clear allusions to Catherine's sex and the minority of the king, they implied that the edict itself was perhaps illegal as well as divisive for recognizing the Protestant religion:

> Laws both sacred and profane insist that the woman is in holy bond to her husband and children in holy bond to their father, which is to say that the entire family [and by implication, the family of Henry II] is of the same religion as the father of the family. And not without good reason, as this is the firmest bond of union, friendship, and obedience owed; which if lacking, produces nothing but contention, rancor, and division, and one could not say that God resides there.[50]

Only after receiving two formal letters of *jussion* (royal commands to the court to register legislation without further delay) did the Parlement of Paris reluctantly register the 'Edict of January' on 6 March 1562. Even then, they did so with the explicit amendment that they were doing so against their will and only at the king's command. But they already knew it would be impossible to enforce, as the Catholic reaction to the edict had already erupted in violence. Just a few days earlier on 1 March, in fact, Catherine's edict that was supposed to bring peace ultimately led to the civil war she had so desperately wanted to avoid. The first shots were fired by troops of the duke of Guise, as he encountered a group of unarmed Protestants worshipping inside the town of Vassy. The resulting

[50] *Remonstrances faictes au Roy par messieurs de la cour de Parlement de Paris, sur la publication de l'Edict du moys de Ianvier* [1562] (Paris: Nicolas Lombard, 1566 edn.), unpaginated, fols. Aiiii, Biii–iiii, and Cii.

'massacre', as the Huguenots would henceforth call it, marked the beginning of three generations of armed struggle over the issue of religion. The Protestant churches of France held a national synod the following month at Orléans and requested that Louis de Bourbon, prince of Condé, raise troops to protect them from further persecution. When Condé issued a manifesto calling on Protestants to raise arms to oppose Guise and the Triumvirate, the kingdom of France was divided against itself.