Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585

Philip Benedict
Guido Marnef
Henk van Nierop
Marc Venard
editors

Mout
Benedict
Marnef
Constant
Van Nierop
Crouzet
Duke
Venard
Spaans
Turchetti
Woltjer
Christin
González de León
Parker
Greengrass
Tracy

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
P.O. Box 19121, 1000 GC Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Proceedings of the colloquium,
Amsterdam, 29 – 31 October 1997

ISBN 90-6984-234-3

Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen
Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 176

Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585

Edited by Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop and Marc Venard

Amsterdam, 1999

Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen
Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 176

Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585

Edited by Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop and Marc Venard

Amsterdam, 1999

Table of Contents

Philip Benedict

The Dynamics of Protestant Militancy: France, 1555-1563

Few historians of the Low Countries would deny that that at several critical junctures during the Revolt of the Netherlands the actions of militant Calvinists drove the revolt forward or destabilized the situation just when it appeared that a solution to the religio-political crisis besetting the region might be found. Dutch historiography depicts the Reformed as establishing their privileged position in the Northern Netherlands through a 'revolutionary Reformation' in which the Calvinists sought the eradication of Catholic worship, compulsory participation in the rituals of the Reformed Church, and a new moral and legal order, although they ultimately were only able partially to obtain these goals, since they comprised too small a fraction of the total population to impose their will entirely.[1] Belgian historians discern similar goals to the movement and call the period of Reformed dominance in the cities of Flanders and Brabant the time of the 'Calvinist Republics,' suggesting a return to the insurrectionary traditions of the medieval commune.[2]

By contrast, historians of France generally depict the Huguenots as more respectful of the established authorities and as having more limited political goals. A very different sort of moral capital accrues to those involved in successful and unsuccessful enterprises. While the Dutch Reformed were eager to assert from independence onward that the Revolt of the Netherlands took place '*religionis causa*', French Protestant historical writing long sought to deny that the Huguenot cause was in any way seditious or revolutionary. From this concern emerged the powerful historiographic tradition that depicts the Huguenots as fighting simply to uphold basic freedoms of worship and belief. This tradition is epitomized in the work of such nineteenth-century scholars as Eugène Arnaud, who was so convinced that the Huguenots were battling for these freedoms that when he discovered them outlawing the mass in regions of Dauphiné under their control, he wrote: 'One sees ... that the Reformed of the sixteenth century, who were fighting for freedom of conscience and worship, did not always understand this'.[3] It still animates such late twentieth-century works as Nicola M. Sutherland's *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition*, which asserts that the essential conflict in sixteenth-century France was between Catholic extremism and the crown, whose policy of moderation the Protestants were simply

[1] Van Gelder, *Revolutionnaire Reformatie*.
[2] Despretz, 'Gentse calvinistische Republiek'; Decavele (ed.), *Rebelse droom*; Marnef, *Calvinistisch bewind*.
[3] Arnaud, *Protestants du Dauphiné*, I, 176.

defending.[4] The greatest master of the years leading up to the outbreak of the Wars of Religion, Lucien Romier, was himself strongly indebted to this tradition. While his exceptional acquaintance with the sources of the period made him eminently aware that the spread of Protestantism soon gave rise to acts that went beyond the defence of rights of worship, he was no less impressed by the many Reformed statements that stressed the obligation of obedience to the powers that be and counselled against the unjustified use of force. He resolved this apparent contradiction by arguing that the movement was fundamentally respectful of the established authorities, but that the sociological process of its expansion denatured it by bringing it under the sway of ambitious noblemen and 'simple' converts animated by 'fanaticism' and a thirst for agitation.[5]

Against this tradition, many recent historians have located destabilizing or even revolutionary implications closer to the ideological heart of the Protestant movement. This is especially true of those scholars who have studied Huguenot crowd actions in the wake of Natalie Zemon Davis's pathbreaking article on the rites of violence.[6] That particularly ambitious and idiosyncratic work within this tradition, Denis Crouzet's massive canvas of religious violence, identifies a 'revolutionary radicality' lurking at the heart of the French Protestant movement because of the rationalizing thrust of Calvin's theology, and speaks of 'the French "Volksreformation" ... a lost revolution of history'.[7] Janine Garrisson-Estèbe notes impulses within the movement that sought to annihilate the Roman Church in crusade-like fashion so as to leave the kingdom's rulers no choice but to rally to the new Church.[8] A considerable volume of recent work has reconstructed the scope and character of Huguenot iconoclasm and related this convincingly to core Calvinist beliefs.[9] But for all of its importance, this work has still provided only a partial reinterpretation of the ambitions and actions of those enthusiastic multitudes who joined the young Reformed Churches in the *anni mirabili* of their growth in France. Neither Garrisson-Estèbe nor Crouzet followed up their remarks with a detailed investigation of what the Huguenots attempted in the localities that they seized in the first period of their expansion. No work in this tradition has reopened the full dossier of the Protestants' aims and actions, nor has any explored how and why the effort to establish a new Church order quickly also gave rise to an organized para-military system.

Such are the goals of this essay. Informed by an awareness of what the historiography of the Low Countries has shown about the Calvinist movement there, it will attempt to answer the following questions. Just what did those who rallied to this cause in France seek? What steps were they willing to take to achieve their goals? Why did crowd actions, religious violence, and an organized para-military system follow so quickly upon the organization of independent Reformed churches? Did this

[4] Sutherland, *Huguenot Struggle*, 3.
[5] Romier, *Royaume*, II, ch. 7, esp. 227-9, 267, 299.
[6] Davis, 'Rites'.
[7] Crouzet, *Guerriers de Dieu*, 508-10, 552-3.
[8] Garrisson-Estèbe, *Protestants du Midi*, 161.
[9] Sauzet, 'Iconoclasme'; Benedict, *Rouen*, 58-62; Crouzet, *Guerriers de Dieu*, chs. 7-10; Christin, *Révolution symbolique*, chs. 1-3.

agitation stem from the core values of the movement, or is it to be attributed to the symbiosis of the movement with other contemporaneous groups or movements with agendas of their own? The answers to these questions, we shall see, reveal a French Protestant movement closer akin to Calvinist movements elsewhere in Europe than previous French historiography would suggest.

Protestantism's growth in France between 1555 and 1562 was stunningly swift.[10] The creation of independent churches *à la mode de Genève*, soon linked together by the network of synods established at the first national synod of 1559, served as a precipitating agent that leached out of the established Church many of those who had been drawn to evangelical ideas over the preceding decades, while serving as so many local bases for the further dissemination of such ideas. Just four years after the first two churches were founded in 1555, seventy-two churches sent delegates to the first national synod. By 1562, upwards of a thousand congregations were probably gathering, with a total membership that can be roughly estimated at between 1.5 and 2 million people. Noblemen and town dwellers were particularly attracted to the cause; at the outbreak of the First Civil War, the Protestants formed a substantial enough percentage of the urban population to seize control of roughly a third of the sixty largest cities, even if in many of these cities they comprised a minority of the population prior to their seizure of power.[11] Because of the speed of the movement's growth and its disproportionate appeal to nobles and townsmen, contemporaries perceived it to be even bigger and more powerful than it was, a perception of considerable importance in understanding its aggressive *élan* at the flood tide of its expansion. 'The truth is that the Protestants surpass the Romanists in weight, if not in number', one pamphleteer wrote in 1562. Others suggested that a quarter or even a half of the population had embraced the new faith.[12] Since the great bulk of the evangelical propaganda that had been filtering into France over the preceding decades had been Reformed in inspiration, and since ministers of Genevan formation or persuasion were so important in organizing the new French churches, this movement was overwhelmingly Reformed in character. No enduring Protestant churches of any other confessional orientation emerged — an obvious difference from the Netherlands. But the hegemony of Genevan ideas and institutions within the French Reformed churches was only achieved after much wrestling with church members whose opinions on specific points were at some variance with those of Calvin, Beza, and Viret.

To understand the aspirations of the Protestant movement in France on the eve of the Wars of Religion, no better starting point exists than the numerous pamphlets and

[10] Good recent summaries may be found in Greengrass, *French Reformation*, 38-62; Benedict, 'Settlements: France', 427-35; Crouzet, *Genèse*, chs. 4-5; Jouanna, *France*, ch. 20.

[11] This estimate was obtained by establishing the 57 most important cities on the basis of the tax assessment placed upon the kingdom's walled towns in 1538 (see Braudel and Labrousse (eds.), *Histoire économique et sociale*, I/1, 406-7; Benedict, *Cities and Social Change*, 8-9) and then determining their fate in 1562. Reliable estimates of the percentage of the population won over to the Reformed church prior to the Protestant takeover are available for only a few cities; the percentage was in the vicinity of 20 per cent in Rouen and 33 per cent in Lyon. On Protestantism's appeal to the French nobility, see Chapter 5.

[12] *Mémoires de Condé* (1740), II, 813, 900-01; Guilleminot, *Religion et politique*, 151.

appeals written between 1559 and 1562, many of which took the form of remonstrances to the nation's rulers. These make it clear that the movement sought far more than mere 'recognition' or freedom of worship.[13] A few 1561 Remonstrances requested the limited goals of a moderation of persecution and permission to assemble in separate churches, but the chief and fondest hope expressed by the greatest number of appeals was that the corrupt clerical establishment would be swept away and the pure worship and doctrine of the primitive Church established throughout the land. Repeatedly the manifestos call on the young Charles IX or the Queen Mother to imitate the glorious example of a Constantine, a Theodosius, or a Josias, to restore the Temple, and to burn the idols of Baal. Systematic content analysis of the sort applied to the German *flugschriften* of the early Reformation has yet to be attempted for the many French pamphlets of this era that take up issues of doctrine or criticize the established Church. In these works, however, four themes appear to recur with particular frequency: (1.) the attack on idolatry in all of its forms; (2.) the need to replace the Mass with a simpler eucharistic service; (3.) the call to preach the salvific messages of justification through faith alone; and (4.) the need to give all believers direct access to the Bible in the vernacular. The visual propaganda of the time is characterized above all by the mocking satire of the corruption and false pretensions of the Papacy, the religious orders, and the *Sorbonnastres*, all of whom have grown fat from the sale of invented ceremonies, useless indulgences, and other false wares.[14]

Furthermore, the thorough reformation sought by many '*evangélistes*' involved more than restoring proper Church doctrine and ritual. Pamphlets also urged the rulers to oversee a much needed renewal of manners and morals, to redirect the excessive wealth of the Church to practical social and political ends, and to eliminate abuses within the army and judiciary. The 1560 *Maniere d'appaiser les troubles qui sont maintenant en France* asked Catherine de Medici not only to restore the ancient apostolic faith, but also to reward outstanding servants of the king and nation by granting them the ecclesiastical property that was not needed to support pastors, churches, schools, or the poor; to take stronger action against blasphemers, magicians, Epicurians, sodomites, and adulterers; to end the venality of office and institute open investigations of the qualifications of potential judges; and to tighten up discipline in the army. Other suggestions voiced in comparable pamphlets included using Church revenue to reduce taxes or repurchase alienated portions of the royal domain; attacking drunkenness, fraud, and usury; requiring each parish to nourish its own poor; requiring the clergy to work; and taking measures against all Anabaptists and Rebaptizers, including those Catholics who have forced infants baptized in the Reformed Church to undergo a second Catholic baptism.[15] These were the views of

[13] This and the following paragraph are based above all on the pamphlets collected in the *Mémoires de Condé* and such other pamphlets of the time as *Juste complainte*; [Marlorat], *Remonstrance a la Royne Mere*; *Remonstrance à la royne mere du roy tres Chrestien*; De Silly, *Harangue*; *Grand pardon*. See also De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, chs. 1-2; Guilleminot, *Religion et politique*; Romier, *Royaume*, II, 218-23.

[14] Benedict, 'Of Marmites and Martyrs'.

[15] *Mémoires de Condé* (1740), I, 341-96, II, 546-60, 644-53; *Mémoires de Condé* (1743), II, 215-20; 'Juste et saincte defense'.

converts with access to printing presses. In some corners of southern France, the rural population understood the call to reform society around the principles of the gospel in a manner comparable to so many of their German counterparts: as a reason to question seigneurial obligations and the tithe.[16]

Such were the aspirations. But what if the king or Queen Mother did not prove to be a new Josias or Theodosius — as of course they would not? What might individual subjects or ministers who embraced the pure word of God do then to advance the much needed renewal of Church and kingdom? Here the great dilemmas of political obedience arose.

One of the most penetrating accounts of the French Protestants' response to the concrete problems of obedience that confronted them remains Vittorio de Caprariis's now almost 40-year-old *Propaganda e pensiero politica in Francia durante le guerre de religione*. De Caprariis discerned within Calvin's thought contradictory impulses that in turn were transmitted to the French Protestant movement as a whole. On the one hand, Calvinism as a system of ideas may be said to have been born of the need to prove that the evangelical call for Church reform was not seditious. The first version of the *Institutes* was written to demonstrate to Francis I that the evangelicals were not the promoters of disobedience that their enemies claimed them to be. Throughout his subsequent writings, Calvin stressed the need to obey the duly constituted authorities time and again. No less central to Calvin's thought were an implacable certitude that it grasped and expressed the will of God and an intense antipathy for the abominations of Popery, from which all true believers should separate themselves. These convictions were the very root of Calvinism's power as a force for galvanizing diffuse evangelical sentiments into an organized opposition Church.[17] When Calvin sent suggestions to the faithful within the country indicating to them how they could form properly ordered churches of their own, he clearly implied his willingness to see them take steps that he knew were in violation of the duly established laws, in order to obey the commandments of God.

Denis Crouzet's chapter in this volume further elucidates the ambiguities of Calvin's political thought. For present purposes, it is sufficient to note that, while he frequently reprimanded those who engaged in 'turbulent' or 'disorderly' activities beyond what he considered the bounds of legitimate disobedience to iniquitous commands, his writings about political obligation included the well-known proviso that where lesser magistrates had a legal role in formulating or implementing the law, they might disobey a superior power who disregarded their authority. In August 1559, he allowed himself to be easily convinced by the highly debatable legal argument that the action of kings was subject to a degree of oversight until they reached their full majority at the age of 25, and that the Estates General and princes of the blood had the authority to establish and guide the regency council required in such

[16] Courteault, *Monluc historien*, 408-11, remains the fullest account of the anti-seigneurial agitation that accompanied the spread of Protestantism in parts of the Midi. Despite Courteault's call for further study of 'cet aspect si originel du mouvement réformé,' this agitation still awaits its Gunther Franz or Peter Blickle.

[17] De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, chs. 1-2, esp. 17-19, 71, 90-92. Eire, *War Against the Idols*, is also insightful on these questions.

instances, which legitimized measures of resistance to the government of Francis II if the first prince of the blood, Antoine de Navarre, could be convinced to assert this putative right. Together with Theodore Beza, Calvin then tried hard to convince Antoine to do this. If Calvin kept his distance from the Conspiracy of Amboise, surviving letters indicate his involvement in the preparations for the thwarted attempt to seize Lyon in September 1560 known as the 'affaire de Maligny' — this despite the fact that his correspondence was culled after his death to remove potentially embarrassing missives.[18] The failure of this enterprise led him to greater circumspection in the subsequent period, but even as he renewed his exhortations to orderliness and his scolding of those who took the law into their own hands, his sermons grew increasingly sharp in their criticism of the French kings and the 'monkeys' whom they allowed to dominate their courts.[19]

For all of Calvin's influence on the Protestant movement, however, he was not its sole opinion-leader, nor can its early history be written exclusively from Genevan sources, no matter how strong a pull they exercise because of their exceptional richness and accessibility. The fact that Calvin and the Genevan-trained ministers denounced or sought to remove pastors whose preaching encouraged unsanctioned iconoclasm demonstrates that some French ministers endorsed removing the 'idols' without tarrying for the magistrate. A number of churches and ministers, including several pastors of both Paris and Geneva, appear to have been involved in the conspiracy of Amboise even if Calvin kept his distance from it.[20] As many historians have seen in recent years, examining the actions taken by the Protestants in the different corners of France provides the best way of grasping the aspirations and convictions of the full universe of those drawn to the movement. Also of great value are the under-utilized records of the earliest Reformed synods and consistorial assemblies. These enable us to determine which of the actions taken by groups of Protestants in the localities occurred with the probable approval of local Church authorities, which were consistently condemned, and which were taken without prior approval but were subsequently accepted as legitimate by Church bodies within the kingdom.

As already noted, Calvin's encouragement of the formation of Reformed congregations and his dispatching of ministers to France suggest that he believed it acceptable to defy the laws prohibiting heretical assemblies. The establishment of hundreds of Reformed Churches across France represented the most fundamental Protestant violation of the established laws. This clearly took place with the approval of all involved. We have decisions of a local consistory, a provincial synod, and a national synod which took up the issue of whether or not ministers might preach or church assemblies gather even if unauthorized or expressly forbidden. In every instance the body carefully avoided condemning this, although the national synod warned 'there should be special care had of the Time, and Publick Peace, and above all that there

[18] De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, 28-31; Naef, *Conjuration d'Amboise*; Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, ch. 7; Dufour, 'Affaire de Maligny'; for the culling of Calvin's correspondence: *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, VI, 168, 179, IX, 47.,

[19] Nijenhuis, 'Civil Disobedience'.

[20] Romier, *Conjuration d'Amboise*, 65-72; Naef, *Conjuration d'Amboise*, 219-31; Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, 69-74.

be no tumults nor Sedition'.[21] The 1560 *Juste complainte des fideles de France. Contre leurs adversaires Papistes et autres*, justified the holding of church assemblies despite laws prohibiting these with the argument that even if the powers that be were ordained of God and had to be obeyed in all matters that did not harm true piety, 'as soon as the edict commands impiety, we answer with the Apostles that God must be obeyed rather than man'. To disobey a ruler who issues a wicked edict of this sort 'is not to disobey a King but a tyrant'.[22]

The earliest Protestant assemblies were generally secret gatherings, but once the Protestants gained a measure of strength in any locality, they sought to meet in public places, preferably in already established church buildings. Often they petitioned first for permission to do so. When these petitions were denied, they frequently went right ahead and occupied churches. The Huguenots of Nérac worshipped in one of that city's churches as early as 1558. Church takeovers became more common in the spring and summer of 1560, in the wake of the March amnesty for past instances of heresy and the May reorganization of the prosecution of this crime that brought heresy executions to a halt within the jurisdiction of the parliament of Paris.[23] After these public assemblies were ended by the royal agents sent to the affected areas in the last months of Francis II's brief reign, the exhilarating twelve months that followed his death in December 1560 witnessed a new, more widespread surge of church takeovers across the Midi and the Loire valley.[24]

'To make merry [*seggaier beaucoup*] and occupy temples, you know that that has never been our advice, unless permission has been granted', Calvin wrote reprovingly to Paris in February 1561. 'When that is done it is to our despite'.[25] The churches inside the kingdom came to hold a different view. Events in Nîmes are particularly revealing. In August 1561, that city's consistory received a letter from their brethren in Montpellier asking if they could seize a church for their use. The Nîmois replied negatively. Then, a month later, a group of Nîmes Protestants, led by several men of relatively high birth, seized the church of the Franciscans. At its next assembly, the consistory reprimanded these men for their action but simultaneously voted, nine to five, to keep and use the church, since it had been taken without tumult and

[21] Quick, *Synodicon*, Part 1, 20; Gemeentebibliotheek Rotterdam, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam [henceforward 'GB Rotterdam, BRGR'], MS 404, fo. 33 (decision of the provincial synod of Normandy 12 May 1561 from a collection of early synodal minutes); Ménard, *Nismes*, IV, 297 (which cites extensively the exceptional consistorial registers of Nîmes' church from this period, the first of which I also consulted in the original: Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Français 8666.)

[22] *Juste complainte*, 32.

[23] Monter, 'Exécutés pour hérésie', 209, 223.

[24] Utilizing such sources as Calvin's correspondence, the *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, Devic and Vaisette, *Histoire générale du Languedoc*, and local and regional histories of the Reformed Churches in this era, I have discovered the following instances of churches being taken over for worship (with date): Nérac 1558; Cognac prior to April 1, 1559; Valence and Romans spring 1560; Nîmes June 1560 for several months and then again September 1561; Agen January 1561; Issigeac February 1561; Auch March 1561; Lectoure May 1561; Montauban, Poitiers, and Sauve July 1561; Montpellier, Castres, Le Mas d'Agen, and Millau September 1561; La Rochelle, Blois, and Tours October 1561; Orléans fall 1561; Bazas December 1561; Annonay January 1562. Further investigation would doubtless uncover additional cases.

[25] Calvin, *Opera*, XVIII, 378.

was sorely needed. Within two weeks, the consistory was assigning elders to guard the church and advising a nearby community that such takeovers were permissible, so long as they were done peacefully, without battering down the church doors.[26] At almost exactly the same time, the provincial synod of the Ile-de-France, Picardy, Champagne, and Burgundy decided that churches could be taken where there was no danger of sedition.[27] The *Juste complainte* asserted that the movement of church assemblies into public buildings needed to be done to show the falsity of the widely circulating charges that the Protestants' assemblies involved promiscuous orgies and secret conspiracies.[28]

The claim that church takeovers and public worship were necessary to respond to Papist lies illustrates a larger point of great significance for understanding the dynamics of Protestant militancy: once the initial step of assembling in defiance of the law had been taken, other steps came to be seen as justifiable to counter the way in which the government or Catholic opinion reacted to the initial assemblies. This is particularly important with regard to two of the boldest steps taken by the Reformed: their creation of a para-military apparatus on a national basis, and their mobilization in 1562.

Once the Protestants began to worship publicly, their gatherings risked disruption by law enforcement officials or Catholic crowds. As early as July 1557, groups of Protestants in the Cévennes armed themselves to resist efforts by royal and ecclesiastical officials to arrest them. Over the subsequent years, many other individual churches mounted armed guards around their assemblies or defended themselves by force against attack.[29] The exact process by which these local measures of self-defence were transformed into a more highly organized and regionally or nationally integrated para-military system remains obscure at many points. It nonetheless appears to have emerged in two stages, with, *pace* Romier, the assemblies and ministers of the church playing an increasing role with time.[30] The initial efforts were made in the spring and summer of 1560. These were linked in at least one case to the preparation for the Conspiracy of Amboise: according to Regnier de la Planche's 1576 account, a summons from an agent of La Renaudie prompted sixty churches in Provence (a province where inter-confessional violence began early and the Conspiracy gained exceptional local support) to send delegates to a gathering in Mérindol,

[26] Ménard, *Nismes*, IV, 305-11.
[27] GB Rotterdam, BRGR, MS 404, fo. 36.
[28] *Juste complainte*, 18-19.
[29] Devic and Vaissete, *Histoire générale du Languedoc*, XII, 559-61, 567-9; De Ruble, *Antoine de Bourbon*, IV, pièces justificatives, letters of July 11, 1559, November 3, 1560; Philippi, 'Troubles', 32; Nicollier-De Weck, *Languet*, 145; Gaullieur, *Réformation à Bordeaux*, 230.
[30] The development and significance of this system is a major theme of Romier, *Royaume*, II, 260-5. The same ground is also covered at some length in Doumergue, *Calvin*, VII, 353-78, who corrects Romier on a number of errors of fact and criticizes him for exaggerating the extent to which these developments brought the movement under the sway of an adventurous nobility. Subsequent scholars have not always been aware of Doumergue's corrections of Romier, the most important of which is his observation that the acts of the 1560 provincial synod of Clairac, published by Bourgeon, *Réforme à Nérac*, 83-4, provide no substantiation for Romier's assertion that the first regional system of defense began to be elaborated here. See also Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, 109; De Pablo, 'Armée huguenote', 196.

where they established a militia led by Paul de Mauvans.[31] Military defence may also have been a component of the initial association of the scattered churches in Brittany, where (in the words of a late seventeenth-century Protestant historian with access to substantial documentation about the early years of the Church), 'many gentlemen and others with authority in the Church' assembled at La Fonchaye in May 1560 and 'made common alliance and promised to aid one another with their goods and persons'.[32] Languedoc's governor alleged in September 1560, perhaps unreliably, that the Protestants between Montpellier and Nîmes were able to muster a thousand armed soldiers.[33]

A surer picture of the efforts at regional military organization emerges in the second phase, from the autumn of 1561 onward, for in this period the regular consistorial and synodal assemblies of the Church were directly involved and the minutes of their meetings reveal the steps taken. These emphasize defensive considerations. At its assembly of September 1561, the provincial synod of the Ile-de-France, Picardy, Champagne and Burgundy decided to ally with the neighbouring ecclesiastical provinces 'to aid and succor one another against all popular mutinies and impetuosities and undertakings of Priests, who, without the authority of the Magistrate and contrary to royal prohibitions and the requests of the Estates, rise up to oppress and sack the Churches or faithful or prevent the preaching of the word'.[34] A month later, Nîmes' consistory records (extant from March 1560 onward) offer the first evidence of that church's arming, with measures to create a militia and eight military captains.[35] In November, the Guyenne synod of Sainte-Foy resolved to have each church form an 'enseigne' of troops and to group these into regiments by colloquys. The memoirs of Blaise de Monluc indicate that this was quickly done and that, when the churches of the region offered him these troops to help him maintain order in his capacity as royal commissioner, the first envoys who put this proposal before him were two ministers.[36] Around the same time, the provincial synod of Dauphiné and the Lyonnais reacted to the churches' growing involvement in political and military affairs by ordering each congregation to establish a separate council to handle such affairs, leaving the consistories and synods to concern themselves strictly with religious matters — a division of responsibilities pioneered in Castres as early as the spring of 1561 and also followed by other churches in the six months after this synodal decision.[37] But the establishment of such councils did not mean that the network of synods and consistories ceased to play any role in political or military mobilization. In January 1562, Theodore Beza both went in person to the provincial synod of

[31] *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées,* I, 418-22 (a section of this work copied, according to its editors, from Regnier de la Planche, *Histoire de l'estat de France … sous le regne de Francois II*); Arnaud, *Protestants de Provence*, I, 107-20. It may be wondered if sixty churches existed in Provence by 1560.
[32] Le Noir de Crevain, *Histoire ecclesiastique*, 37-8.
[33] Guiraud (ed.), *Réforme à Montpellier*, 141.
[34] GB Rotterdam, BRGR, MS 404, fo. 36.
[35] Ménard, *Nismes*, IV, 310; Naef, *Conjuration d'Amboise*, 225.
[36] *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, I, 888; De Monluc, *Commentaires*, 476-7.
[37] Arnaud, *Documents protestants inédits*, 33; Gaches, *Mémoires*, 10; Ménard, *Nismes*, IV, 327; Gascon, *Grand commerce*, 480; Benedict, *Rouen*, 98.

the Ile-de-France, Picardy, Champagne and Burgundy and dispatched circular letters to churches elsewhere in the kingdom to persuade them to determine how many men they could support in the event that troops had to be mobilized. Such measures were necessary, he said, in case the king needed assistance to prevent foreigners (i.e. the Guises) from usurping power.[38]

The Protestant mobilization at the outbreak of the First Civil War drew upon these preparations. Here too ministers and regional synods or political assemblies played a major role, and here too the theme of defence was sounded. On 20 March 1562, Beza dispatched a circular letter to all churches declaring that the time had come to arm and defend to maintain the authority of the king and the rights of worship granted by the edict of January.[39] Five days later an assembly of ministers and noblemen in Saint-Jean-d'Angély, variously described as a synod and an *assemblée politique*, gathered to determine if the Bible permitted taking up arms in defense of liberty of conscience, to deliver the king and Queen Mother from captivity, and to punish violators of the law and the public tranquillity. It decided that it did.[40] Local justifications of Protestant takeovers of individual cities frequently explain these as necessary to forestall plans to exterminate the Huguenots.[41] Insofar as the arming and mobilization of the churches indeed stemmed from fears for their members' safety — and rumours of Catholic extermination plots ran rampant through Protestant circles during this period — the Huguenots' actions may be seen as a further example of that common, tragic pattern, whereby a state or group of individuals responds to what they perceive as defensive imperatives with actions that their enemies in turn perceive as aggressive, thereby further escalating the level of conflict.

Neither the mobilization of 1562 nor earlier isolated acts of defense against Catholic aggression commanded the unanimous support of all Huguenots. Hubert Languet reported that when he found himself amid a group of Parisian Protestants attacked by stone-throwing Catholics as they returned from services in October 1561, some in the group preferred to endure the blows rather than draw their swords.[42] After the mobilization of 1562, the city of La Rochelle and several nobles of Saintonge made their opposition to the decision of the Saint-Jean d'Angély gathering known and persisted in their refusal to take up arms even after the main body of the Church deputized a minister to try to convince them that the mobilization was justified.[43] A current of Huguenot opinion opposed the taking up of arms.

[38] GB Rotterdam, BRGR, MS 404, fo. 23; *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, IV, 245-6, XI, 333. The 'papier et registre du consistoire de l'Eglise du Mans réformée selon l'Evangile 1560-1561' in *Recueil de pièces inédites*, 61, 64-5, reveals the church of Le Mans receiving and acting upon these circular letters. I would like to thank Prof. Glenn Sunshine for providing me a copy of this rare work.

[39] *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, IV, 254.

[40] De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, III, 202; *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, II, 821; Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, 109.

[41] 'Juste et saincte defense'; *Remonstrance des habitans de Rouen*. Parrow, *From Defense to Resistance*, points out that self-defense was a legally sanctioned justification for actions that would otherwise be considered criminal.

[42] Nicollier-De Weck, *Languet*, 144.

[43] De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, III, 202; Barbot, *La Rochelle*, II, 174; Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, 109-10.

Closely related to this issue, although not identical, was the matter of whether or not co-religionists held in prison might be sprung from jail. Calvin's attitude toward such actions contained interesting ambiguities. In a letter of 1559, he wrote that even if the prisoners were freed not by force but through bribery, the use of duplicate keys, or other non-violent means, he would not dare to advise in favour of such an action, but he would pray that the operation succeeded and rejoice if it did.[44] The consistory of the French Church in London went farther and positively endorsed the use of master keys or other non-violent means in 1561.[45] Inside the kingdom Protestants did not stop at the boundary of non-violence. From 1559 through 1561, repeated efforts were made to free fellow believers who had fallen into the clutches of the law. Many of these efforts involved force.[46] Despite Calvin's insistence that martyrdom was to be welcomed if necessary, many church members clearly believed that imprisoned brethren should be delivered from such a fate if possible.

Yet concerns for self-defense, the defense of fellow believers, and the defense of a king threatened by ill-intentioned foreign grandees fail to explain all aspects of Protestant militancy. The troops assembled by de Mauvans in Provence in 1560 did not simply repel Catholic attacks. They raided across the countryside, seizing church plate and ornaments. They invaded the Papal enclave of Avignon. And they sought vainly to take several cities, where they hoped to organize public preaching and free imprisoned co-religionists.[47] More generally, wherever the ranks of the movement began to swell toward a position of local dominance, aspirations commonly surfaced for the immediate elimination of the idols from the temple, the ridding of the land of useless religious, and the abolition of the 'stinking' mass. In the heady year 1561, when no less than ten pamphlets proclaimed the imminent defeat of the Papacy,[48] actions began across the Midi to achieve these aspirations.

The excellent recent studies of Huguenot iconoclasm have both revealed the basic chronology of French iconoclastic incidents and helped make sense of this once ill-understood phenomenon.[49] From the summer of 1561 onward, the isolated attacks on

[44] Calvin, 'Mémoire', 576.

[45] *Actes du consistoire de Threadneedle Street*, I, 38. The same deliberation approved the carrying of arms to intimidate enemies but declared that the consistory could not offer advice about when or if they might be put to use. See also here Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 240.

[46] Even Anne du Bourg was almost liberated from the Conciergerie after his conviction. Lelièvre, 'Anne du Bourg', 508; Monter, 'Exécutés pour hérésie', 208-9. Other episodes of attempted or successful liberations of prisoners are known to have occurred near Meaux in August 1559; in Bergerac in October 1559 and July 1560; between Blois and Orléans in November 1559; in Sainte Foy in August 1560; in La Rochelle in November 1560; in Bordeaux in February 1561; and in Rouen in January, August, December 1560, and December 1561. Monter, 'Exécutés pour hérésie', 208-9; De Lacombe, *Débuts des guerres de religion*, 37; De Ruble, *Antoine de Bourbon*, IV, pièces justificatives; Gaullieur, *Réformation à Bordeaux*, 199, 242; Benedict, *Rouen*, 62. Again, a fuller survey would surely reveal more such incidents.

[47] *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, I, 422-3; Arnaud, *Protestants de Provence*, I, 118-20.

[48] Guilleminot, *Religion et politique*, 168.

[49] Christin, *Révolution symbolique*, chs. 1-3, and Crouzet, *Guerriers de Dieu*, chs. 7-8, both provide detailed treatments of iconoclasm in France and form the basis for this paragraph, except as otherwise noted. Among the many studies devoted to this phenomenon elsewhere in Reformation Europe, Eire, *War Against the Idols*, provides a particularly compelling account of both crowd iconoclastic activities and the theologians' critique of the veneration of images.

Catholic shrines or holy objects that had previously typified French iconoclasm gave way to the systematic purification of many local churches across important stretches of Languedoc, Gascony, and Dauphiné. The same followed in the regions elsewhere in France secured by the Protestants at the outbreak of the First Civil War soon after these areas came under Huguenot control. The very first normative document of the French Reformed churches, the 'articles politiques' of the proto-synod held at Poitiers in 1557, warned sternly against knocking over crosses, idols, or churches — a prohibition that was transformed by later provincial synods into interdictions against doing so without magisterial authorization. When the surge of major iconoclastic episodes began to break over France, by far the most common pattern was for the work to be carried out by groups of individual believers, with the ministers and consistory publicly proclaiming their non-involvement after the event.[50] Christin has nonetheless shown on the basis of judicial investigations that community notables played a leading role in certain incidents, and while no evidence has yet been unearthed of consistorial involvement comparable to that found for many cases of *Wonderyear* image-breaking in the Netherlands,[51] indications do exist not only that certain French ministers encouraged the iconoclasm, but also that some local authorities sanctioned it, either before or after the fact. A Catholic historian who claimed to have been an eyewitness to key scenes reported that the iconoclasm in Caen in April 1562 followed a meeting before the town's judicial authorities in which the minister Cousin told the assembled officials 'that we have suffered too much from this idolatry, and that everything would be toppled'. After his threat was made good, those who carried out the destruction returned with arms to the council chambers and demanded and received payment for their work.[52] Even in the cases where the iconoclasm occurred without magisterial or ministerial sanction, the most persuasive analyses make it clear that the image-breaking is best understood as ritualized action expressive of core Reformed ideals and the psychology of conversion. It was at once a pedagogical demonstration of the pure materiality of the images, a cleansing of the temple in obedience to divine commandments, and an expression of the anger that the newly converted felt about the continuation of the frauds that had once ensnared them. Tracts written after the event in the name of the larger Church community, even while denying that the Church approved the image-breaking, depict it as providential and pleasing to God, thereby suggesting a measure of approval.[53]

The war against the idols was just one part of the surge of Protestant militancy in late 1561 and early 1562. In many of the same localities, members of the religious houses also either began to leave their convents voluntarily or were pressured to do so. In Millau, the first two religious abandoned holy orders in October 1561. Over the

[50] *Remonstrance des habitans de Rouen*; *Apologie des ministres et anciens de Rouen*; Barbot, *La Rochelle*, II, 171; Romier, *Royaume*, II, 225-6.
[51] Pettegree, 'Exile Churches', 86-7; Marnef, *Antwerp*, 89; Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland*, 227-8 (I owe this last reference to Guido Marnef).
[52] De Bourgueville, *Recherches et antiquitez de Normandie*, 162, 170. For other instances of ministerial encouragement of iconoclasm: Christin, *Révolution symbolique*, 115; Crouzet, *Guerriers de Dieu*, 504-8. For other cases of magisterial sanction: Faurin, 'Journal', 9-10; Christin, *Révolution symbolique*, 102-13.
[53] *Apologie des ministres et anciens de Rouen*; Christin, *Révolution symbolique*, 100.

next two months, bands of masked men broke into several of the town's religious houses and threatened their occupants, finally driving the reluctant Celestines from their convent by setting it afire. 'Insofar as possible, the mass was now driven out'.[54] Comparable events are known to have occurred in, *inter alia*, Castres, Montauban, Nîmes, and Montpellier.[55] With the mass ended, the religious houses abandoned or taken over, and Reformed services taking place in newly purified churches by the end of the year, one indeed sees the utility of the concept of a French *Volksreformation*. In roughly one of every ten important cities, a new religious order had been established even before the outbreak of the First Civil War.

In these towns, the Edict of January prompted a new drama of conscience. While decreeing toleration for Reformed worship outside of walled cities, this edict ordered the restoration of Catholic services where these had ceased. John Knox is known to have considered the reestablishment of idolatry in places where it had once been abolished even more reprehensible than its sufferance where it had long existed.[56] Many Huguenots evidently agreed. Although the ministers and deputies of the churches gathered at court urged compliance with the edict, the authorities of Castres resisted returning the churches they had seized. Nîmes' consistory and *conseil de ville* voted to permit the mass to resume, but angry crowds prevented Catholic clergymen from performing the ritual in two parish churches. In Montpellier the sole attempt to resume saying the mass had to be quickly brought to a close after a howling Protestant crowd gathered outside the church and rock throwing began.[57]

As winter gave way to spring in 1562, a triple dynamic can thus be seen to have fuelled Protestant militancy. First, the eagerness of many of the newly converted to see pure worship instituted spurred pressure for civic reformations from below. The tolerant provisions of the Edict of January reduced this pressure; they did not end it, for in certain communities, such as Annonay, the same sort of agitation can be witnessed between January and March as took place in Millau or Nîmes between October and January. Second, Catholic resistance to the terms of the Edict of January, the massacre of Vassy, and the spreading rumours of Catholic extermination plots fed Protestant fears for their safety and encouraged proactive measures in the name of self-defense. And third, the duke of Guise's role in the massacre of Vassy and the actions of the Triumvirate in the wake of that event created a situation in which the constitutional claim to be taking up arms to protect the king and to remove him from evil councillors could once again be invoked. All three ran together to stimulate the takeover of numerous cities throughout the kingdom. Once these cities were in

[54] *Mémoires d'un calviniste de Millau*, 24-30, esp. 30. See also Gaujal, *Etudes historiques*, IV, 428-34, 444.

[55] Faurin, 'Journal', 9-13; Guiraud (ed.), *Réforme à Montpellier*, 195-212; Ménard, *Nismes*, IV, 313-20; Serr, *Église protestante*; Gamon, *Mémoires*, 12-15. In some parts of the Midi Catholicism had collapsed by the end of 1561 without being replaced by regularly functioning Reformed churches, as in Tonneins, where a minister passing through reported 'de long temps les ydoles sont rompues, nulles messes ne se disent, presque tous le prebstres du Pappe si sont mariés' but a Protestant minister was lacking. Calvin, *Opera*, XVIII, 726.

[56] Knox, *On Rebellion*, xx.

[57] GB Rotterdam, BRGR, MS 404, fo. 30; *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, I, 762-5; Faurin, 'Journal', 13; Menard, *Nismes*, IV, 331, 345, Guiraud (ed.), *Réforme à Montpellier*, 233-4.

Protestant hands, steps to abolish the mass and close the religious houses soon generally followed.

In that important minority of French cities that the Protestants controlled by May 1562, many of the hopes expressed in the manifestos of 1559-1562 had thus come to pass. The temples had been purged of their idols. The sacraments were rightly administered. The useless drones who had once populated the religious houses had been scattered or forced to take up a craft. At this point, we might think back to the original Remonstrances and ask if the new Protestant masters of these towns also sought the moral and political regeneration that certain of these appeals suggested would accompany any restoration of the pure gospel.

The extant documentation for answering this question is sparse. Many contemporary accounts of events in the cities that witnessed civic reformations in late 1561 or came under Protestant control at the outset of the First Civil War say little about efforts at a reformation of manners. The military crisis of the moment may have so dominated the authorities' attention that such concerns frequently fell by the wayside. Furthermore, few modern studies have explored in detail the experience of such cities under Protestant domination. This is an important desideratum for further research.

Some highly revealing evidence is nonetheless provided by the decisions of the provincial assemblies that met amid the First Civil War in the Huguenot-controlled parts of Languedoc and Dauphiné. The Languedoc estates of November 1562 and March 1563 were above all concerned with creating and financing a system of military defense, to be placed under the command of the count of Crussol. The seizure of all clerical lands and revenues except those dedicated to education or charity was decreed, but in this time of war the surplus could hardly go, as the Remonstrances of 1560-1561 had suggested, to repurchasing the royal domain or rewarding outstanding royal officials. Instead, it had to be dedicated to Mars. Still, these assemblies took some steps that reached beyond the domain of military affairs. They ordered the local authorities to establish a system of pensions for those Catholic clerics who had given up their benefices. They sought to limit the political authority the Reformed Church had apparently come to exercise in some areas by decreeing that the ordinary civic authorities should reassume all powers taken from them 'because of the needs of the time' and limiting Church participation in their deliberations to the attendance of non-voting deputies. They issued regulations concerning the assignment and payment of ministers, asserting in the process a measure of secular authority over the clergy. And they provided some of the most compelling evidence available that the rural population of parts of the Midi understood the appeal to Scripture as sanctioning temporal emancipation, with a call to all magistrates to act against the 'plague of libertines' who in several parts of the province had claimed the authority of the gospel to cease paying seigneurial obligations.[58]

The Dauphiné 'assemblies of the nobility and of the common estate' of December 1562 and January 1563 established a far more sweeping blueprint for a new politico-religious order. In addition to detailing a system for raising and paying troops, the

[58] 'Collection des procès-verbaux', XXII, 511-16, 546-57, XXIV, 314-22.

December assembly in Montélimar required all inhabitants of the province to attend Reformed services[59] and to bring newborns to the first 'preaching gathering' for baptism. It declared all inhabitants to be subject to ecclesiastical discipline. Strong civil penalties were decreed against prostitutes, fornicators, games of chance, blasphemy, dancing, dirty or profane songs, and the visiting of taverns by others than travellers. Positions of political authority within the province were reserved for those who had been members of the Reformed Church for at least six months, and the magistrates were urged to seek the advice of the church's ministers where appropriate. All schoolmasters were required to sign the church's confession of faith and to submit to examination by the local church colloquy. Poor relief was placed under the control of the church deacons, and both deacons and ministers were assigned salaries to be taken from the revenue of the pre-existing church tithes and benefices. As in Languedoc, obstinate Papists were ordered banished from the province, and the judges were exhorted to act against all 'libertines' and 'Anabaptists' who invoked the gospel to free vassals from their lords.[60] Here, as perhaps nowhere else, can be seen what the triumph of the Huguenot movement amid less troubled circumstances might have entailed. Strikingly, although these decisions of the Dauphiné assemblies were published long ago by local historians, historians of French Protestantism have rarely cited them and have failed to recognize their full significance.

Scattered bits of information about the largest cities seized by the Huguenots in 1562 offer further evidence of efforts to impose a new moral order. Beza's letters allude in passing to the execution of a prominent couple guilty of adultery during the last days of Huguenot domination of Orléans.[61] The *Histoire ecclesiastique* claims that Rouen's new municipal authorities were zealous in reforming poor relief.[62] Most tellingly, a set of ordinances issued in Lyon in September 1562 by Condé's lieutenant there closely regulated the city's taverns, penalized blasphemy and gaming, required inhabitants to attend the Reformed services, and prohibited commercial activity during the hours of worship. Significantly, these measures, like those of the Dauphiné and Languedoc estates, were issued in the name of the king, to whom the Protestants continued to claim to be loyal.[63]

Because the aspirations that took shape within the French Protestant movement at the flood tide of its expansion would never be more than momentarily and partially

[59] The Languedoc assembly of November 1562 rejected such a requirement lest enemies of the faith learn and betray church secrets.

[60] Lacroix, *Arrondissement de Montélimar*, VI, 115-26. Very similar measures were decreed at Valence in January 1563. *Documents protestants inédits*, 46-78; Dussert, 'Baron des Adrets'.

[61] *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, IV, 138, 140.

[62] *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, II, 728. On the period of Huguenot domination in Rouen, see also Benedict, *Rouen*, 97ff; Le Parquier, *Siège de Rouen*, neither of which are able to say much about the actions of the Huguenot authorities as the municipal registers of deliberations are missing for this period.

[63] *Ordonnances du Roy*. I owe this information to the kindness of Marc Venard, who discovered a printed copy of these ordinances in the Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen, Fonds Leber 3977. The measures do not appear to have been known to Richard Gascon, whose brief account of the actions of the Protestant authorities of Lyon between 1562 and 1563 depicts a regime more concerned with promoting efficient commerce and settling old scores with rival ecclesiastical judges than instituting a Reformed moral and religious order. Gascon, *Grand commerce*, 477-92.

realized, their full scope has not always been clear. Because the leaders of the Reformed Church not only insisted so profusely on their loyalty to the crown and their respect for the public order but also shaped so many of the documents and traditions that would subsequently inform perceptions of their activity, the full range of ways in which their adherents challenged the established order has taken a long time to be recognized. From this review of the evidence, however, it is clear that the Huguenots sought far more than just recognition or liberty of conscience. They dreamed of a Church order and a Christian community reformed according to the purity of God's word, and saw in that word a detailed blueprint of just what was required. The movement would never have developed without its willingness to disobey laws prohibiting its assembly. Once assemblies began, and as it became clear that the crown would not institute the changes it sought, members were willing to take other actions both to defend and to advance what they were convinced was the cause of Christ and His Church: arming for their defense, freeing imprisoned co-religionists, seizing Catholic church buildings, purifying the churches of their images, driving out the priests and the mass. Some of these actions, such as the seizure of church buildings or the raising of troops, would be initiated by, or come with time to be approved by, the official assemblies of the Church. Others, such as iconoclasm, might receive a mixture of approval and censure. Still others would never be formally approved. To be sure, as the anti-seigneurial agitation in the South makes clear, different groups in the population drawn to the movement appropriated its principles and rallying cries in different ways, in accordance with their own experience and interest. It would also be naive to depict all converts to the cause as sincere adherents to Reformed principles. Still, to separate the militance of those who initiated these actions too sharply from the cause's core values, or to suggest that a fundamentally orderly religious movement was captured and denatured by one class or another, is clearly implausible. Even while its leaders insisted on its loyalty and called for order, the creation of the new Reformed churches excited ambitions for the transformation of Church and community, unleashed a dynamic of institutional creation and defense, and created in its adherents at least briefly a conviction of being caught up in an unstoppable movement that represented nothing less than God's will. This was profoundly destabilizing.