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Religion und Gewalt

Konflikte, Rituale, Deutungen (1500–1800)



Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Herausgegeben von

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Religion and Politics in Europe, 1500–1700

by

PHILIP BENEDICT

The historical literature on early modern Europe conventionally locates the critical moment in the secularization of European politics around the middle of the seventeenth century. In Theodore K. Rabb's *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*, still one of the most important attempts to discern a general pattern to the history of the early modern period, "the decline of religion as a stimulus to violence" stands as one of the fundamental causes of the broader emergence of stability in European affairs after the prolonged crisis of the long Reformation era that is the book's central theme. Rabb dates the moment when religion ceased to be a key precipitant of international wars quite precisely to the later phases of the Thirty Years' War. Religion's disappearance as a cause of internal violence followed after an unspecified, but presumably brief, "time lag".¹ Paul Monod's *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe 1589–1715* focuses on the language and legitimization of monarchy rather than the causes of political instability, but it too diagnoses a clear progression, from sacral kingship to rational politics, with the watershed coming shortly after midcentury.² Heinz Schilling's influential version of the confessionalization thesis concurs. The era when confessional considerations influenced politics ended around 1650.³ Throw-away phrases can be particularly revealing of scholarly commonplaces. So, J.G.A. Pocock speaks at one point in his recent *Barbarism and Religion* of

¹ THEODORE K. RABB, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford 1975 esp. p. 80, 81.

² PAUL KLEBER MONOD, *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe 1589–1715*. New Haven 1999.

³ SCHILLING, Confessional Europe, in: *Handbook of European History 1400–1600. Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, II. Eds. THOMAS A. BRADY JR./HEIKO A. OBERMAN/JAMES D. TRACY. Leiden 1990 p. 641–670, esp. 669–670.

Europe's "Wars of Religion, conventionally supposed to have ended with the Peace of Westphalia."⁴

The "conventionally" in Pocock's last phrase is of course a sign that he has some doubts about this claim. Others have questioned it as well. Hartmut Lehmann's 1980 *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus* argues vigorously against seeing 1648 as a key moment of secularization in Europe. According to Lehmann, church affairs, theology, and piety lost none of their significance until the early eighteenth century.⁵ Arno Herzog's 2000 survey of post-Reformation recatholicization efforts in Central Europe extends the era of confessionalization even farther, into 1780s in the Habsburg lands.⁶

I too would question the claim that religion ceased to influence politics significantly after 1648. My aims in this paper are three. First, I seek to call attention to the essential reasons why it is no longer convincing to claim that European political life tipped decisively in the direction of secularization around 1650. Second, more significantly, I want to explore some of the conceptual issues involved in understanding the very complex relationship between religion and politics in the early modern period. Finally, since the proper response to imperfect generalizations is not just criticism, but better generalizations, I shall try to suggest alternative patterns for characterizing the changing relationship between religion and politics across the early modern centuries. I will focus mainly on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but will also glance forward at times to the eighteenth century as well.

I.

At least two good reasons exist to question the claim that international relations had become secularized or that religion had ceased to be a cause of violence by the end of the seventeenth century. First, the language and rituals of politics still contained powerful religious dimensions in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Such practices of sacred kingship as the royal touch for scrofula flourished in France, if not in Protestant England, well into the eighteenth century.⁷ The 1670s and 1680s saw a wave of expulsions

⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 1. *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764*. Cambridge 1999 p. 100.

⁵ HARTMUT LEHMANN, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus: Gottesgnadentum und Kriegsnutz*. Stuttgart 1980 p. 17.

⁶ ARNO HERZIG, *Der Zwang zum wahren Glauben: Rekatholisierung vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 2000 p. 10.

⁷ MARC BLOCH, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*. London 1973.

of religious minorities from Western as well as Central European territories by rulers eager to restore unity of faith and burnish their reputations as protector of the church. Certain of these expulsions in turn provoked rebellions, notably in Hungary and Southern France, that can hardly be characterized as anything other than religious wars. Furthermore, much of the rhetoric accompanying the international wars of the end of the seventeenth century cast these as struggles to defend the true faith, hailed the Protestant hero William III as a new David, and endowed the wars with millenarian urgency.⁸ Indeed, contemporaries do not appear to have perceived any dramatic break between the politics of their own time and that of earlier periods. A particularly striking expression of their sense of continuity between the late seventeenth century and earlier eras of religious warfare may be found in Gilbert Burnet's *History of My Own Time*. Here Burnet identified five great political crises in the history of European Protestantism, five moments of apparently decisive struggle when it appeared as if entire religious coloration of the continent hung in the balance. These were

- 1.) 1547–1548, when it appeared as if the entire initial establishment of Protestantism in so many German territories might be rolled back following Charles V's defeat of the princes of the Schmalkaldic League.
- 2.) late in reign of Queen Mary (c. 1557–1558), "when the Protestant religion seemed extinguished in England and the two Cardinals of Lorraine and Granvelle [...] designed a peace [...] that their masters might at leisure extirpate heresy, which was then spreading in both their dominions."
- 3.) 1585–89, when Spain seemed to be on the verge of crushing the Dutch rebels, the Armada was launched against England, and the Catholic League in France looked as if it might deny the throne to Henry of Navarre.
- 4.) 1620–1630, a decade of disasters for the Protestant cause in the Thirty Years' War and in France, culminating in the edict of restitution that ordered the restoration of Catholicism in many parts of the Empire the Peace of Alais that abolished the military privileges of the Huguenots.
- 5.) Burnet's own time. In this period, a particularly prolonged crisis had begun with the French invasion of the Netherlands in 1672. It had escalated with the revocation of toleration in Hungary, France, and Savoy, and with the accession of Catholic rulers in Britain and the Palatinate. According to Burnet, who first began writing his history around 1700 and

⁸ PIERRE JURIEU, *L'accomplissement des propheties ou la delivrance prochaine de l'Eglise*. Rotterdam 1686; WALTER REX, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy*. The Hague 1965 p. 216–235.

revised it for publication twenty years later, "we are yet in the agitations of it."⁹

Not only does Burnet's history express his evident sense of continuity between his own time and earlier periods that we unhesitatingly label ones of religious war. It also offers an alternative pattern for characterizing the interaction of religion and politics between 1500 and 1700 to which we shall return: not a linear movement toward secularization with a single key turning point, but a pattern of recurring crises with increasingly long intervals between them.

The second reason to question the claim that the middle years of the seventeenth century witnessed a watershed in the relation between politics and religion in Europe is that over the past twenty-five years several groups of historians working on different aspects of the early modern era have offered strong new evidence for the continued force of religious belief and religious affiliation in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century politics. One thinks here of the work of Geoffrey Holmes or Tim Harris on popular politics in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, of the work of Dale van Kley and others on the political significance of the disputes surrounding Jansenism in mid eighteenth-century France, of recent German work demonstrating the continuing volatility of confessional questions in the Holy Roman Empire after Westphalia.¹⁰ More important yet for thinking about this subject has been the great shift that has taken place in our understanding of the long Reformation era that has led the Reformation and Counter-Reformation to be recognized as involving long-term transformations of Christian practice at the parish level that required generations to accomplish. In many regions, this was not completed until 1700 or even beyond. What I have called elsewhere the "weak theory of confessionalization"¹¹ has been particularly useful where it has demonstrated that by 1700

⁹ Bishop Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, I (2 vols.). London 1724-1734 p.310-321, esp. 311, 321.

¹⁰ GEOFFREY S. HOLMES, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell*. London 1973; *Politics, Religion and Society in England, 1679-1742*. London 1986; TIM HARRIS, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Politics and Propaganda from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis*. Cambridge 1987; DALE VAN KLEY, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765*. New Haven 1975; IDEM, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy*. New Haven 1996; CATHERINE MAIRE, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation. Le Jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris 1996; JEFFREY MERRICK, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge 1990; DIETER STIEVERMANN, *Politik und Konfession im 18. Jahrhundert*, in: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 18. 1991 p.177-199.

¹¹ PHILIP BENEDICT, *Confessionalization in France? Critical Reflections and New Evidence*,

ordinary people were not only more engaged in the organized worship of the churches to which they belonged than was the norm in many areas in 1500; they were also more likely to think of themselves as belonging to a specific variant of Christianity – as Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed – rather than simply as Christians as they would previously have done. This group consciousness was built as much through the anathematization of rival faiths as it was through inculcation of a positive appreciation of the particular doctrines and rituals characteristic of each individual confession. Intermarriage between the different religious groups became rare.¹²

The growing strength and salience of attachment to particular variants of Christianity between 1500 and 1700 would not seem logically to promote a secularization of politics over the course of this period. On the contrary, we might expect it to have two other kinds of political consequences. First, in the climate of reinvigorated piety and more strictly orthodox religious education that characterized seventeenth-century Europe, we might expect that Europe's rulers themselves might often be deeply pious individuals. By no means all were, but one need only think of the difference between the behavior of the later Austrian Habsburgs, educated by the Jesuits, and their predecessors of the mid-sixteenth century, to see how these trends might have produced an increased likelihood of religious warfare.¹³ Second, as the population as a whole came to identify with a specific confession, the margin of maneuver rulers had to modify the religious situation in their lands might be expected to narrow. This clearly happened. Indeed, it can be dated with precision to the years around 1600. The middle years of the sixteenth century saw territories undergo as many as four changes of religion within a generation, as rulers of different convictions came to the throne and altered the state religion within their territories at the stroke of a pen. For this period, the legal maxim mentioned in all textbooks about Reformation Europe, “cuius regio eius religio”, accurately describes the relation between a ruler's

in: IDEM, *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots*. Aldershot 2001 p. 311–313, also published in: *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World 1559–1685*. Eds. R. MENTZER/A. SPICER. Cambridge 2002 p. 46–48.

¹² ETIENNE FRANÇOIS, *Protestants et catholiques en Allemagne. Identités et pluralisme*, Augsburg, 1648–1806. Paris 1993; GREGORY HANLON, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth Century France: Catholic and Protestant in Aquitaine*. Philadelphia 1993; BERNARD DOMPNIER, *Le venin de l'hérésie. Image du protestantisme et combat catholique au XVIIe siècle*. Paris 1985.

¹³ Cf. PAULA SUTTER FICHTNER, *Emperor Maximilian II*. New Haven 2001; ROBERT BIRELEY, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini S.J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy*. Chapel Hill 1981; JOHN P. SPIELMAN, *Leopold I of Austria*. New Brunswick 1977.

faith and that of his subjects. By 1600, it no longer did. A generation or more of indoctrination in the locally established confession had by this time produced political nations that were sufficiently attached to that confession to resist efforts to eradicate it when a ruler of another faith came to the throne. So, when the Catholic Sigismund succeeded to the Swedish throne in 1592, the Swedish Riksdag met in Uppsala before he could be crowned to proclaim that the Augsburg confession was the only legitimate religion of Sweden and to demand his acceptance of this principle before his coronation. In Hesse-Kassel in 1605 a ruler who converted from Lutheranism to Calvinism still proved able to impose his new faith on his territory, but only after much rioting against the new church services in the principal towns. The difficulties of implementing this change were probably what convinced the elector of Brandenburg John-Sigismund, who likewise was won over from Lutheranism to Calvinism and sought around 1613 to introduce his new faith into his lands, that the wisest course was simply to grant limited toleration for Reformed worship, while maintaining Lutheranism as the principal established religion. Thereafter, to best of my knowledge, no European ruler ever attempted to replace one uniform, mandatory state church with another of a different confession, except with an army at his back in wartime. At most, rulers tried to reduce or eliminate regimes of toleration previously granted a fraction of their subjects, or to introduce toleration for their own faith where it had not previously existed. Even then, they often encountered considerable resistance. Here is another pattern in the relation between religion and politics 1500–1700 worth remembering and returning to.

II.

Strong reasons clearly exist to question whether the Thirty Years' War truly constituted a turning point in the secularization of European politics. Other interesting patterns can also be discerned in the relationship between politics and religion during the early modern centuries. But before pursuing further the task of constructing and accounting for an alternative way of characterizing the changing relationship between religion and politics over this period, it is necessary to stop and examine some important conceptual issues. Is it even helpful to assert that that extremely complex and nebulous thing "religion" was "a stimulus to violence"? If it is, how and why was it a stimulus to violence? Should we in fact call the major conflicts that arose as a result of the religious changes introduced by the Reformation "wars of religion"? How do we know a religious war when we see one?

As anybody familiar with the historiography of this period knows, the question of what constitutes a religious war is extremely tricky. For virtually every conflict for which the label of a war of religion is conventional, controversy exists among historians over whether or not it was truly a war of religion, or whether other motives were paramount. Konrad Repgen tried to cut through the confusion in his important 1987 article “What is a religious war?” He pointed out that the actual reasons for going to war in the confessional age can hardly ever be exclusively or even predominantly attributed to religion. Alongside religious considerations, competing dynastic claims, security concerns, and treaty obligations also shaped the decisions of the various belligerents to go to war. Efforts to determine which motive was most important in the final analysis often quickly butt up against the limits of the available evidence.¹⁴

The solution that Repgen offered to this problem was to propose that the label “religious war” be taken as a “legitimation type”, not a “motivation type”. The precise motives of most participants in the conflicts of this era may never be known with certainty, he argued; still, since the participants in just about every European conflict of this era felt compelled to explain the justice of their cause in print, we can see how they justified their actions in their published manifestos. Examining hundreds of such manifestos, he found that the justifications offered for entering into a war could be sorted into twelve recurring types. Religious wars, according to his typology, were those justified as necessary to prevent the true religion from threatened extermination, to defend or extend specific rights of religious practice, or to eliminate a dangerous heresy. They were not identical to crusades, which were justified by papal bulls and accompanied by indulgences that promised those who fought absolution for their sins or less time in purgatory. It is worth noting that crusade bulls and indulgences were issued for just a few early modern conflicts, notably the Spanish Armada and the 1600 rebellion of the Earl of Tyrone.¹⁵ In this sense, strictly speaking, most early modern religious wars were not crusades.

Repgen’s argument offers a very helpful and elegant solution to the problem of how to recognize a religious war when we see one. At the same time,

¹⁴ REPGEN in: *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*. Eds. E. J. KOURI/TOM SCOTT. New York 1987 p. 311–328. See also his related article, *Kriegslegitimation in Alteuropa. Entwurf einer historischen Typologie*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 241. 1985 p. 27–49. Unfortunately, the important agenda that this latter article sets out for research into the changing ways in which Europe’s rulers legitimated their wars does not appear as yet to have yielded any final published results.

¹⁵ NORMAN HOUSLEY, *The Later Crusades*. Oxford 1992 p. 260, 319.

there are at least certain cases where the documents *do* enable us to reconstruct why belligerents went to war. In other instances, the motivations of participants in conflicts can be inferred from the close scrutiny of their actions and of the discourses of legitimization that surrounded them, in the manner pioneered by studies of rioting crowds. The latter techniques even permit one to suggest a third way of defining a religious war as a “behavior type”. Religious wars by this definition are those in which belligerents devote significant attention to attacking the sacred objects or religious symbols of the other party, or where they regularly attempt to force defeated enemies to convert or show respect to their sacred symbols. Since the question of just what kinds of beliefs or circumstances spark religious conflicts is of the highest interest for anybody trying to understand these phenomena either in the past or today, motivation and behavior deserve continued attention alongside legitimization, even if they may not always offer the surest way of classifying conflicts as religious or non-religious.

The question of whether or not the wars of religion were truly motivated by religion is as old as the conflicts themselves. When early modern people debated this, they typically did so with reference to the sincerity of the individuals involved and from the vantage point of their own religious perspective. The pamphlets of the early years of the French Wars of Religion, for instance, recurrently took up the question.¹⁶ They consistently asserted that those of the other faith could not possibly be acting from sincere religious conviction. Their professions of religious concern were merely a mask for ambition, avarice, or another base passion. True religious concern was only ever found in one’s own party, and even there a variety of motives could be discerned. Many acted in the zealous service of God’s will, but hypocrites and sinners also abounded – how else to explain why God did not always favor the cause with victory? The refusal of virtually all sixteenth-century authors to admit that their enemies might act out of sincere religious conviction must be related above all to the widespread assumption of the time that the rudiments of true religion were inscribed, if only weakly, in the conscience of every individual. When people actively opposed the true faith, this could only be because evil passions overcame their innate comprehension of the proper course of action.

Since historians are often the prisoners of their sources not only for the information they can obtain but also for the questions they ask, this focus on the sincerity or insincerity of the actors in the conflicts has often carried over

¹⁶ The following remarks rest on extensive reading in the pamphlets and correspondence of the years 1559–1598.

into modern historical accounts as well. This is not a particularly helpful way to proceed. To convince ourselves of this, we need only look at the political advice offered by two Habsburg royal confessors in the early years of the Thirty Years' War. In the immediate aftermath of the Bohemian revolt, when the Austrian Habsburgs were threatened with being ousted from their richest possession and the balance of electoral power within the Holy Roman Empire stood in danger of tipping from the Catholics to the Protestants, the royal council in Madrid debated whether Philip III should come to the aid of his Austrian cousins or stay out of the conflict and continue to focus on recovering from the crushing burden of the preceding half century of war, the better to prepare for the likely renewal of conflict with the Dutch in 1621. It is a mark of the close relations between confessors and kings in the Habsburg world that Philip III's confessor Luis de Aliaga was an active participant in this debate. Strikingly, he led the campaign against intervention.¹⁷ A few years later, after the Spanish had in fact come to the aid of their Habsburg cousins and helped them defeat the Bohemians, the Emperor Ferdinand II faced a very similar issue in Vienna. Having regained his throne in Bohemia, should he now make peace, or should he take up the cause of recovering for the Catholic church the ecclesiastical territories seized by the Protestants elsewhere in the Empire, at the risk of continuing the conflict. He also consulted his confessor, the Jesuit William Lamormaini. Lamormaini urged him to grasp the nettle and issue the edict of restitution. "God promises us the victory in a short time; his cause drives [us]. God can easily grant us victory whether we are weak or whether we are strong. Let the giants, the sons of Enoch, or Goliath not strike fear in us; with God's assistance we will devour them."¹⁸ Both confessors were presumably pious men. It does not seem helpful to label one truly religious and the other a hypocrite. Yet they embraced diametrically opposed positions in similar situations.

Two key points may be drawn from this contrast. The first is that political thought and political symbolism in this period spoke with many voices. Christian theology did not dictate a single answer when faced with the sorts of practical moral questions at stake in situations conducive to religious wars, questions such as "When can the toleration of heresy be justified?", "Is it appropriate to intervene in a war on behalf of co-religionists to defend the

¹⁷ PETER BRIGHTWELL, The Spanish Origins of the Thirty Years' War, in: European Studies Review 9. 1979 p. 409–432; IDEM, Spain and Bohemia: The Decision to Intervene, 1619, in: European Studies Review 12. 1982 p. 117–142, esp. 117, 129.

¹⁸ ROBERT BIRELEY, The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts and Confessors. Cambridge 2003 p. 123; BIRELEY, Religion and Politics (cf. n. 13) chs. 3–5, esp. p. 131, where the quoted passage is rendered slightly differently.

true faith?", "Under what conditions is resistance to superior authority permissible?"¹⁹ Furthermore, Christian theology offered only one of several possible languages for thinking about these questions. The state could be envisaged as created by either God or men to ensure the public peace and protect the welfare of its citizens. It could also be envisaged as having the duty to uphold God's commandments and protect the Christian church. The ideal ruler could be figured as the Christian king, protecting the true faith and embodying in his own comportment such attributes as piety and modesty; or he could be figured as the warrior king; or as a paragon of liberality and splendor; or as the father of his people seeing to their nourishment in times of need; or as the fount of justice. Often these various ideals or languages coexisted simultaneously within the same texts and the same courts. Recognizing the disordered multiplicity of the ways of thinking about politics and figuring royal authority in this period is central to thinking usefully about it. Too often general interpretations come to grief by postulating too great a unity of outlook.

The second key point to take from the contrast is that to understand the motivations of religious conflict, it is necessary to unpack the black box we label "religion" and identify the specific beliefs or attitudes that particularly encouraged or discouraged people to act in ways that provoked conflict. To say this is simply to state as a rule of method the lesson that could be taken away from the many excellent studies of the past quarter century that have illuminated specific instances of religious conflict. Thanks to the work of Natalie Davis, of Nicholas Tyacke, of Carlos Eire, and of many others, many of the specific beliefs that positively encouraged the likelihood of religious conflict in this period are now clear. Any catalogue of such beliefs might begin with the following:

- the belief in many lands that heretics represented a dangerous and polluting presence whose elimination protected the country from harm; God would withdraw his blessings from lands that tolerated heresy. This belief was often coupled with the classic Augustinian arguments about the value of punishing heresy for both those subject to this punishment and for the commonwealth as a whole.²⁰

¹⁹ The variety of answers given these questions by the members of a single Catholic religious order at a specific moment is the central theme of BIRELEY's important recent *Jesuits and the Thirty Years War* (cf. n. 18).

²⁰ See here especially NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS, *The Rites of Violence*, in: IDEM, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*. Stanford 1975 ch. 6; ERNEST W. NELSON, *The Theory of Persecution*, in: *Persecution and Liberty: Essays in Honor of George Lincoln Burr*. New York 1931 p. 3-20.

– interpretations of the biblical injunctions against worshipping graven images that condemned all images in churches and incited converts to acts of iconoclasm. Carlos Eire correctly identified “war against the idols” as one of the great mobilizing rallying cries of the Reformation and perhaps the most revolutionary in its implications.²¹

– the Reformed conviction that the original purity of the early church had gradually been undermined through the introduction of rituals lacking divine institution. This cast any liturgical change that introduced ceremonies into the church lacking biblical sanction as the first step down the slippery slope to popery, and explains the at first sight disproportionate reaction of so many of Charles I’s subjects to Laudian innovations.²²

This catalogue could be vastly expanded. I shall resist the temptation to compile a complete inventory of the specific beliefs that encouraged religious conflict lest this essay grow beyond all reasonable length. I would, however, like to highlight one less frequently remarked upon habit of mind encountered often in the documents of the era of considerable significance for our subject. I propose to call this the stance of prophetic politics. It is the stance that Lamormaini adopted when he urged the Emperor Ferdinand to pursue the restitution of former ecclesiastical territories to the Catholic church. It recurs in the pronouncements of many other key actors in the religious conflicts of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century as well.

The key assumptions associated with prophetic politics are set out particularly clearly in the dedicatory epistle Theodore Beza addressed to the Admiral Coligny in 1565 as a frontispiece to Calvin’s commentaries on the first 20 chapters of Ezekiel.²³ Here Beza tells Coligny that in the midst of the battles he has been called to wage in defense of Christ’s church “nothing can give you as much assurance as comparing the writings of the prophets with histories.” Times may have changed since the prophets wrote, but the same God determines the outcome of events, and the maxims contained in their writings and reiterated by such latter day prophetic interpreters of the biblical books as Calvin “are perpetual and invariable, indeed far more certain

²¹ CARLOS M. N. EIRE, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*. Cambridge 1986.

²² NICHOLAS TYACKE, Puritanism, Arminianism, and Counter-Revolution, in: *The Origins of the English Civil War*. Ed. CONRAD RUSSELL. New York 1973 p. 119–143; PETER LAKE, Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice, in: *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603–1642*. Eds. RICHARD CUST/ANN HUGHES. London 1989 p. 72–106.

²³ Originally published in: *Leçons de M. Jean Calvin sur les vingt premiers chapitres du Prophète Ezechiel*. Geneva 1565, this letter may also be found in THEODORE BEZA, *Correspondance*, VI. Geneva 1970 p. 15–25 and *Ezekiel I* Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries vol. 18. Trans. DAVID FOXGROVER/DONALD MARTIN. Grand Rapids 1994 p. 3–8.

than all the principles of mathematics." God will stand by and reward those who cleave to his commands and follow the rules of political conduct suggested by the historical books of the Old Testament, even in the face of what appears to carnal reason to be superior strength.

In rare instances, literal interpretation of the principle that the prophets offered a guide to policy more certain than mathematics led early modern political leaders to base contemporary decision-making on specific episodes of Old Testament history. One striking instance was the response of the Scottish Covenanters in 1649 to the Cromwellian invasion of Scotland. The example from Judges of Gideon reducing his army to 300 men at God's command before doing battle successfully with the Midianites sparked ministers such as Samuel Rutherford to argue that sincerity of commitment to the Covenant, not mere numbers of troops, was the key to battlefield success. As a result of their advice to purge the ungodly from the army, a large number of mid-level officers deemed insufficiently upright were dismissed on the eve of the battle of Dunbar. The outcome was disastrous: Cromwell decisively crushed the Covenanter cause.²⁴

More commonly, rulers and theologians drew from the Old Testament histories the conviction that moral uprightness and prompt obedience to God's commands, not simple force or numbers, were what moved an omnipotent God to grant victory in battles. Pamphlets of the wars of religion reiterate that God cannot fail to aid his children so long as they cleave to him, even in the face of a more powerful enemy.²⁵ Beza's correspondence with the various noble champions of the Huguenot cause is filled with exhortations to make the psalms the "discipline and rule of your conduct" so as to ensure God's benevolence, interspersed with admonitions that the spread of blasphemy and indiscipline in their armies placed the cause in jeopardy.²⁶ More extreme Catholic formulations of this point of view occasionally suggested that God could be expected to work miracles for those rulers who faithfully upheld his cause, supplementing any inadequacies in their strategic planning as necessary. Other Catholic advocates of strong action in defense of the faith, such as Lamormaini, denied that their policies involved a presumptu-

²⁴ JOHN COFFEY, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*. Cambridge 1997 p. 249.

²⁵ MATHURIN CORDIER, *Remonstrances et exhortations au roy de France treschrestien et aux Estats de son Royaume, sur le fait de la religion* (n.p.) 1561 p. 92; *Remonstrance aux Fideles de persévéérer en leur sainte entreprise*, in: *Mémoires de Condé*, III (6 vols.). London 1743 p. 524; *Dialogue d'entre le maheustre et le manant*. Ed. PETER M. ASCOLI. Geneva 1977 p. 208-211.

²⁶ SCOTT M. MANETSCH, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598*. Leiden 2000 p. 98, 103, 180-181.

ous assurance of miraculous aid; God's ordinary providential control of events as illustrated by numerous Old Testament examples gave sufficient ground for confidence in His support.²⁷ Whether rulers acted in confident expectation of miraculous or merely providential assistance, the mindset that assured them that steadfast obedience to God's commandments required them to fight certain fights and would in turn reap divine assistance was clearly one that encouraged the course of war at critical moments of decision.

III.

Let us now return to the question of whether or not any patterns of change may be discerned in the relationship between religion and politics over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Do we pass from an age of religious war to an age of reason of state, from sacred monarchy to secular leviathan?

In a political universe characterized by a multiplicity of political languages and political symbols, the first point that has to be made is that such changes as occur over time are not likely to involve the complete eclipse of one set of political motives, symbols, or principles by another, so much as shifts in the frequency with which one or another are invoked and prove decisive. It may also be the case that religious conflict declined in frequency not because of any changes in the key assumptions governing political action, but because the circumstances that gave rise to contention over religious questions became increasingly rare.

Already prior to 1500 the world of European politics was a world of multiple political languages. Competing and often contradictory images of good rulership guided political decision making. Religious war was already part of the political landscape, a part now shrewdly analyzed by Norman Housley. From 1400 to 1536, Housley suggests, several powerful traditions or habits of mind had the capacity to incite and sanction violence in which the participants were convinced that God's will was involved: papally sanctioned crusades, the violent millenarianism of the kind epitomized by the Taborites,

²⁷ GEOFFREY PARKER, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II*. New Haven 1998 p. 99–106, 162, 276, 286–287; ROBERT BIRELEY, *The Thirty Years War as Germany's Religious War*, in: *Krieg und Politik 1618–1648: Europische Probleme und Perspektiven*. Hg. KONRAD REGEN. Munich 1988 p. 85–106, esp. 99; BIRELEY, *Religion and Politics* (cf. n. 13) p. 130–131; BIRELEY, *Jesuits and the Thirty Years War* (cf. n. 18) p. 61–62, 111, 123, 153, 159, where Bireley applies the label holy war thinking to what I call in this essay prophetic politics.

and the increasing tendency to conceive of political communities as God's chosen people. Their potential to incite and sanction violence was particularly likely to be unleashed in certain geo-political and historical contexts, notably Christendom's military borderlands with Islam and Bohemia after Hus.²⁸

The fundamental consequences of the Reformation were that it further increased the force of many habits of mind that emphasized the importance of religion for political decision making and multiplied the number of situations conducive to religious conflict. At the same time, however, certain of the outlooks or traditions that had most often supported religious violence in the preceding centuries now waned. This was true of the crusade. Already as the fifteenth century advanced, crusading indulgences sold increasingly badly the more they were proclaimed, and dynastic ambition took precedence over war against distant infidels in the councils of rulers. The continuing expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the proliferation of new Christian heresies after 1517 might have been expected to reinvigorate crusading impulses in the generations following Luther's posting of the 95 theses, but his criticism of indulgences and pilgrimage, combined with the growing dependence of Europe's Catholic monarchs on German and Swiss Protestant mercenaries, worked against the proclamations of new crusades. So too did the tensions that impeded Papal-Spanish cooperation in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Duke Cosimo I of Florence founded a new military order to do battle against the Turks as late as 1562. The Pope issued a plenary indulgence to all who entered a Toulouse confraternity and, "signed with the cross", took up arms to defend the faith and the king during the Second Civil War of 1567-68. As already mentioned, a similar crusade indulgence was granted the Earl of Tyrone and his followers in their 1600 rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I. But these were the last crusades.²⁹ Similarly, violent chiliasm receded after the debacles of Frankenhausen in 1525 and Münster in 1534, although it would revive in Reformed political rhetoric at the outset of the Thirty Years' War, during the English Revolution, and again around 1685.³⁰ On the other side of the ledger, however, the evangelical call to re-

²⁸ NORMAN HOUSLEY, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536*. Oxford 2002.

²⁹ HOUSLEY, *Later Crusades* (cf. n.15) p.138, 260, 319-320, 410-456; HOUSLEY, *Religious Warfare* (cf. n.28) p.195; PETER PARTNER, *God of Battles: Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam*. Princeton 1997 ch. 9.

³⁰ NORMAN COHN, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. New York 1957; MATTHIAS POHLIG, Konfessionskulturelle Deutungsmuster internationaler Konflikte um 1600 - Kreuzzug, Antichrist, Tausendjähriges Reich, in: *Archiv f r Reformationsgeschichte* 93. 2002 p.278-316, esp. 305-307, 310-311; JURIEU, *Accomplissement des prophéties* (cf. n.8).

make society in the name of the pure gospel gave a new force to prophetic politics. Protestant champions urged kings and magistrates to use their power to implement a godly reformation. Catholic preachers urged them to do their duty to protect the one true church. Both of these appeals gave new force to the ideals and language of Christian kingship and to political theories that stressed that the end of the state was to promote and protect God's law. The course of the Reformation's unfolding also created many more Bohemias – lands where new churches became established in situations of illegality and then defended their self-proclaimed right to exist by force of arms. It likewise produced numerous instances where open expressions of Protestant contempt for Catholic devotional practices sparked angry Catholic defenses of objects or doctrines they still considered sacred. It thus created the conditions for religious riots and civil wars. The civil wars in turn often attracted the intervention of neighboring states fearing the spread of heresy close to their own boundaries or the advance of a Catholic reaction that, once it had wiped out the evangelical cause next door, would next be directed against them. Time and again preachers cast their community as God's chosen and a new Israel. In these ways, Luther's protest against the church of Rome gave rise to an increase in religious conflict and warfare.

After about fifty years, the dramatic period of Protestant expansion ended. Yet even as Europe's confessional landscape stabilized, further conflict could easily be sparked over religion because of two persisting features of the politico-religious landscape. First, even while toleration came to be granted to more than one religion in situations where this seemed to be the best way to restore political order, the majority of contemporaries continued to think of toleration as at best a necessary evil, and to believe that the ideal situation was the union of the entire polity in the one true faith. Second, the high mortality rates of the era, the intermarriage of Europe's ruling houses, and the ongoing competition to win high-placed converts combined to produce many situations where rulers of a different faith from that of the majority of their subjects acceded to a throne or threatened to do so. In such situations, people frequently felt compelled to mobilize to prevent a change in the religious status quo or to defend rights of worship granted them.

The potential for religious conflict thus remained present throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nonetheless, as we have already seen, some changes did occur over time.

First, the immediate precipitants of major internal religious conflicts tended to change after about 1600. Before that date, the most common trigger of contention was the appearance and growth of a new confession that destabilized the prior religious situation in a given territory. After that date, the threat of a ruler of a different faith from the majority of the territory's

inhabitants or the proclamation of a royal decree revoking an established situation of religious toleration were the most common precipitants of trouble.

Second, as Burnet's five crises of Protestantism suggest, the religious conflicts spaced themselves out over time with diminishing frequency. Religious agitation was at its height between the 1520s and the 1590s. It then diminished in frequency over the subsequent century and a half.

This diminution in frequency can in turn be attributed to at least three factors. First, while it is misleading to speak of religious languages of politics being superseded by secular ones, there can be no doubt that the mixture of political languages changed over the course of this period. At the very same time that the Reformation was giving a new valence to Christian languages of politics, the dissemination of Machiavelli's works, of the neo-stoic, Tacitean approach to politics championed most famously by the late sixteenth-century humanist Justus Lipsius, and of the reason of state literature of such authors as Giovanni Botero gave rulers an increasing capacity to analyze political affairs with primary reference to the capacities and interests of the state. The hard school of the constant warfare of the early modern era furthered the tendency to make increasing each state's power and war-making capacities a conscious goal of its rulers' policies. The new tradition of natural rights thinking initiated by Grotius in response to the sceptical crisis of the late sixteenth century framed questions of both international relations and the rights of subjects with respect to their rulers in a register that reinforced the conviction that government was established for purely secular ends. One of the best guides to the complex and often contradictory ideals governing politics in this period are the political testaments written by reigning monarchs for the benefit of their successors. The advice to be personally pious and to protect the Christian faith recurs throughout these until well into the eighteenth century. Still, between the later sixteenth and the mid-eighteenth century, the language of the state and the need to serve its interests grow more pervasive.³¹

At the same time that political thought increasingly came to focus on the state and its interests, a more historical approach to the Bible took hold within at least some Christian confessions and challenged one of the fundamental assumptions of prophetic politics: that the events of the Old Testa-

³¹ Cf. *Corpus documental de Carlos V*, II. Salamanca 1973-1981 p. 90-118; *Louis XIV, Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin*. Ed. PAUL SONNINO. New York 1970; *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Ed. CARLILE AYLMER MACARTNEY. New York 1970 p. 310-333, 332-346; *Le Savoir du prince du moyen age aux Lumières*. Ed. RAN HALÉVI. Paris 2002 esp. the contributions of Bruno Neveu, Alain Pons and Halévi.

ment offered an enduring model of proper political behavior. This trend is very clear among the French Reformed. In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, the biblical scholars at the Huguenot academy of Saumur began to elaborate a historico-critical approach to the Old Testament text. Their work on the Hebrew language convinced them that the version previously accepted as best, the so-called Masoretic text, was a relatively late edition that could be improved through the application of philological techniques. They increasingly tended to view the world of the Old Testament as a distant and somewhat alien world – a far cry from the intense identification with the world of ancient Israel one finds among many early converts to Reformed Protestantism. These same theologians were explicitly critical of those earlier ministers of the cause who had used Old Testament arguments to argue against peace at the end of the first civil war and against any toleration of Catholicism in areas where the Protestants were politically dominant. They argued instead that government was of human institution established primarily to achieve such human ends as the peace and welfare of all citizens. Authors such as these did not carry everything before them. They were opposed by other Huguenot theologians and political thinkers. The shifting perspective encouraged by a more historical approach to the Bible nonetheless challenged prophetic politics at one of its central points.³²

A third change of considerable importance was the elaboration of peace-keeping mechanisms that effectively reduced the risk of religious violence in many of the most religiously divided portions of Europe. The story of the nine successive religious peaces instituted in France from 1562 to 1598 may be seen from one point of view as the progressive elaboration of the ever more detailed and complex mixture of limited rights and special privileges that was finally codified in the Edict of Nantes and that ultimately succeeded in creating a legal framework according to which two still bitterly hostile religious groups were able to co-exist peacefully. The provisions of the peace anticipated many of the situations that previously had given rise to confessional disagreement, and provided mechanisms for resolving these disagreements at law rather than by arms.³³ In Germany, similarly, the 1555 Peace

³² The classic study of this change is FRANÇOIS LAPLANCHE, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire. Erudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVIIe siècle*. Amsterdam 1986.

³³ The elaboration of ever more detailed rules to regulate this coexistence may be followed through: *Edits des guerres de religion*. Ed. ANDRÉ STEGMANN. Paris 1979. For the final edict and aspects of its elaboration: *The Edict of Nantes: Five Essays and a New Translation*. Ed. RICHARD L. GOODBAR. Bloomington 1998; PHILIP BENEDICT, *Securing Pluralism amid Intolerance: The Edict of Nantes and its Antecedents*, in: *Quatercentenary Celebration of the Promulgation of the Edict of Nantes*. Ed. THE HUGUENOT SOCIETY OF AMERICA. New York 2002 p. 49–65; and,

of Augsburg laid down certain rules to govern the effective coexistence of Catholics and Protestants. These did not prove fully successfully and broke down in 1618. The Peace of Westphalia then provided for even more complex rules and systems of conflict regulation that effectively prevented any further open religious warfare within the Empire, even though local clashes over the respective rights of the different confessional groups hardly disappeared. These mechanisms were even able to arrange the peaceful relocation to east Prussia of thousands of Protestants expelled from the archbishop of Salzburg in 1731–32.³⁴ The effectiveness of certain kinds of peace-keeping mechanisms, not in changing the hearts and minds of intolerant people, but in preserving successful religious co-existence in situations where a genuinely positive valorization of tolerance might be absent, should not be underestimated.

The shifting balance of political languages that increasingly valorized the power and interests of the state rather than the purity of God's ordinances, the increasing historicization of the Old Testament that challenged the key assumptions of prophetic politics, the development of effective peace-keeping formulae in at least certain countries – these kinds of specific changes led to a progressive diminution of the frequency of religious violence both within and between states over the course of the seventeenth century, even as confessional attachment increased in force and the language and rituals of Christian kingship remained highly potent. Still more significant shifts would follow in the eighteenth century. Belief that nature operated according to strict regularities weakened the conviction that God often intervened either providentially or miraculously in the world, and thus that piety and moral purity were essential to preserving divine favor. Terms such as "nation", "public opinion", and "society" took on a new importance in political discourse. The word "toleration" underwent the great sea change in its semantic fortunes by which it ceased to denote merely the condition of having to put up with an unfortunate evil and became a positive virtue of an enlightened person. In the writings of a Voltaire, the antipathy to clerical intervention beyond the restricted precincts of the temple that was a recurring theme in sixteenth and seventeenth century political discourse metamorphosed into a vision of history that cast the priesthood as the greatest single enemy of peace and the public welfare throughout the ages. By the later part of the century, Frederick the Great could write a political testament virtually de-

more broadly, OLIVIER CHRISTIN, *La paix de religion. L'autonomisation de la raison politique au XVI^e siècle*. Paris 1997.

³⁴ MACK WALKER, *The Salzburg Transaction: Expulsion and Redemption in Eighteenth-Century Germany*. Ithaca 1992.

void of any religious injunctions – although Louis XVI still lavished attention on the religious details of his coronation ceremony and touched for scrofula, with highly beneficial consequences for his popular image.³⁵ If the changes would thus accelerate in the eighteenth century, the years from 1500 to 1700 already witnessed certain important transformations in the relations between religion and politics, even if this change occurred within the parameters of a relatively fixed set of assumptions and beliefs about the relationship between religion and political obligation.

³⁵ DANIEL GORDON, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789*. Princeton 1994 esp. p.43–85; DAVID A BELL, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800*. Cambridge, Mass. 2001 esp. p.22–40; THIERRY WANEFFELEN, *L'Edit de Nantes. Une histoire européenne de la tolérance (XVIe–XXe siècle)*. Paris 1998 p. 199–219; EDWARD PETERS, *Inquisition*. Berkeley 1988 ch. 6; Ed. MACARTNEY, *Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties* (cf. n.31) p.232–246; RAN HALÉVI, *Le testament de la royauté. L'éducation politique de Louis XVI*, in: Ed. HALÉVI, *Le savoir du prince* (cf. n.31) p.345–352.