

***Que sais-je?* Religious Violence, Certainty, and Doubt in the French Wars of Religion**

Mack P. Holt
George Mason University

Most of the religious violence resulting from the religious reformations of the sixteenth century shared much in common with the religious violence of the medieval period that preceded it. It was largely sanctioned by secular and/or ecclesiastical authority. It tended to break out in places where new religious ideas threatened to subvert established ways of navigating the boundaries between the visible world and the invisible world. And it also tended to invoke the certainty of knowing that unorthodox religious ideas and practices, if allowed to go unchallenged, threatened both Christian society in the visible world and eternal salvation in the invisible world. Having said that, however, I also wish to argue for both historicity and specificity in trying to analyze religious violence. It is hardly something monolithic, universal, and inevitable as critics of organized religion are sometimes eager to suggest. Religious violence has to be understood in the social and cultural contexts that produced it. Indeed, one of the most intriguing questions for scholars of the Reformation generally, and the French reformation in particular, is why violence among civilians—neighbors killing neighbors—escalated significantly in the sixteenth century. How do we explain, for example, the scale of popular violence that erupted in Paris and a dozen provincial cities in France in August 1572, known collectively as the St. Bartholomew’s massacres, when maybe 2,000 Huguenots in the capital and another 4,000 in the provinces were murdered?

The most convincing explanation is the classic thesis offered by Natalie Zemon Davis more than thirty years ago. Influenced by the scholarship of social anthropologists, especially Mary Douglas, Davis proposed that understanding the religious violence of the French Wars of Religion required us to understand it as perceived by contemporaries. Thus, for Davis this violence was neither random nor spontaneous, but the product of religious beliefs propagated by some (though certainly not all) militant clergy that the purity of Christian society was being polluted by the presence of heresy, and only through the removal of this pollution could Christian society survive. Since neither the church nor the state in France had managed to achieve this, some Christians thought it was up to them to carry out the ecclesiastical and magisterial actions of purification.¹ Davis's intricate analysis of the mock trials carried out over some of the Huguenot corpses, or mock baptisms performed by others, suggests very convincingly that the perpetrators of this violence legitimated their actions by invoking the authority of the magistrate and the priest respectively. Reinforced by the militant sermons of Simon Vigor, René Benoist, and others to "smite the inhabitants of that city [who worship false gods] with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly and all that is therein," quoting Deuteronomy 13:15, some Parisian Catholics were convinced that both God and king condoned religious violence in order to safeguard Christian society.²

For all its innovative brilliance in helping us better understand what motivated the rioters in sixteenth-century France, Davis's model does not really take up the larger question. If religious violence between Protestants and Catholics in the Reformation really can be

¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* 59 (May 1973): 51-91, reprinted in Davis's *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), 152-187. For Davis's inspiration, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966).

² Davis, "Rites of Violence," 51; and Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 1991), esp. 145-158.

understood in terms of pollution and purification, why wasn't there more of it? In fact, why weren't there more massacres in France, and indeed, all over sixteenth-century Europe in communities where religious tensions were arguably as acute as in Paris? One critic, unfairly in my view, even accuses Davis of arguing that religious violence was inevitable in Reformation Europe.³ She certainly did not argue that, though it is fair to ask why the religious tensions she analyzed so perceptively resulted in bloodshed in some places though not in others. I would like to spend the rest of this paper exploring a community of militant Catholics where there was also a small minority of Huguenots and where a St. Bartholomew's massacre did *not* take place: the Burgundian capital of Dijon in central eastern France. By analyzing why there was no massacre in Dijon in 1572, despite the fact that the city's magistrates and clergy were just as certain as their Parisian counterparts of the dangers of the pollution of heresy in their midst, perhaps we can address the larger question that Davis left unanswered. And it may also allow us, notwithstanding my demand for historical context, to better understand religious violence across time and space in very different historical contexts.

The Edict of Toleration issued in January 1562 by Catherine de Medici, regent for the young Charles IX, recognized the Huguenots for the first time under the law. It was a very bitter pill for most French Catholics to swallow, and the reaction in Burgundy underscores how the doctrinal differences between the two confessions were perceived largely in social terms by the laity. Although the edict did recognize the right of Protestants to exist, it was a very limited existence.

³ Judith Pollmann, "Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence, 1560-1585, *Past & Present* 190 (February 2006): 83-120.

They could neither meet nor assemble in any town or city in France, publicly or privately, and they could only assemble for worship outside all urban jurisdictions. Furthermore, all Huguenots were still required to observe and obey all restrictions on Catholic feast days and other holidays. All these limitations were placed upon the Protestants out of a desire to maintain public order.⁴ And when the Huguenots in Dijon began to contravene these restrictions, the complaints of the mayor and city council were explicitly couched in terms of maintaining public order. In a long list of grievances addressed to the Claude de Lorraine, duke of Aumale, royal governor in Burgundy, the mayor and city council pleaded for the arrest and detention of all those Huguenots who had violated the terms of the edict. There were numerous references to those of "*la religion prétendue réformée* (the so-called reformed religion)" and how their behavior was contrary "to the honor of God, the service of His Majesty, the defense and protection of this city, [and] the peace and tranquility of his good, loyal, and faithful subjects." The twelve specific complaints covered the entire realm of the regulation of the body social: the Huguenots' refusal to observe Catholic feast days, on which "the so-called reformers work and labor publicly and openly in their shops"; the selling of "censured and scandalous" books; tavern-keepers and hoteliers who served meat during Lent and other prohibited periods; the celebration of Protestant weddings and baptisms in the seasons prohibited by the Catholic church "to the great scandal of everyone"; the continued propagation of "secret pedagogies . . . to seduce the poor and tender youth, who are incapable of resisting their odious words"; the "scandalous singing of the Psalms in public in a loud voice"; and even the Huguenot's opposition to the last mayoral election, in which a militant Catholic defeated a Protestant candidate for mayor in June

⁴ N. M. Sutherland, *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (New Haven, 1980), 354-55.

1561. This last complaint, the magistrates argued, was contrary to "all order of the policing of the city and contrary to the inhabitants' right to elect their own magistrates and officers, which had always been a sign of the most famous, ancient, and flourishing republics".⁵

The centerpiece of this list of grievances to the royal governor, however, was clearly the Huguenot attacks against the Catholic Eucharist. "They parade openly in front of the Palais [de Justice] and generally everywhere in all public places selling libels, defamations, efigies and other figures of unworthiness and derision of the holy sacrament of the Mass." Moreover, many Protestants had openly blasphemed the sacrament, "daring impudently to call the holy sacrament *Jean Le Blanc* [John White, or John the Blank]".⁶ Although this was the most explicitly theological of all the magistrates' complaints, it too was understood primarily because of its social implications. Calling the Host *Jean Le Blanc* on account of the color of the white wafer used in the Eucharist was an explicit profanation of the sacred. Like the Protestant taunts in Lyon of "god of paste" that Natalie Davis so convincingly described, this epithet cut to the heart of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation; *le blanc* was a reference not only to the color but also the inefficacy of the Host. It was also an attack on the specific enfolding together of the body social, body politic, and body of Christ that Catholics believed the Eucharist represented. The magistrates informed the governor that they had already imprisoned those Huguenots who had blasphemed the holy sacrament by calling it *Jean Le Blanc*, and they urged him

⁵ A[rchives] M[unicipales de] D[ijon], D 63 (liasse), letter of the *mairie* of Dijon to the Duke of Aumale [spring 1562]. For the significance of the mayoral election of 1561 and the religious division it spawned, see my "Wine, Community and Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Burgundy," *Past & Present* 138 (February 1993), 58-93.

⁶ AMD, D 63 (liasse), letter of the *mairie* of Dijon to the Duke of Aumale, spring 1562.

"to seize the initiative and uphold the king's will so that exemplary punishment can be done to eliminate and quell such audacious and seditious speech".⁷ Thus, although confessional differences were responsible for both the Huguenots' behavior and the Catholic magistrates' reaction to that behavior, it was the social implications of these confessional differences that animated both. The Protestant attempts to redefine the boundaries between the sacred and the profane in Dijon in 1562 were thus perceived by Catholics as a threat not only to their theology, but to the body social and body politic as well.

A different body of evidence sheds further light on the social implications of the Reformation in Burgundy: the numerous certificates of abjuration that all Huguenots were forced to sign if they chose to recant Protestantism and rejoin the Catholic church. There is a good deal of formulaic sameness to them, and they obviously reflect the perceptions of the city magistrates who collected these certificates more than the views of those Huguenots who signed them. Nevertheless, they reveal a great deal. First of all, these certificates tell us little about the intellectual process of religious conversion and abjuration in any meaningful way, because signing one was the only way any Protestant who was imprisoned or whose property had been seized could liberate himself or his goods. This was not mandated by any of the edicts of pacification during the civil wars (and it was explicitly contrary to some of them), but it was the will of the local magistrates: the mayor and *échevins* on Dijon's city council. Moreover, the chronology of these abjurations makes it very clear that whenever large numbers of Huguenots were imprisoned, large numbers of abjurations immediately followed. Of the surviving sample of certificates of abjuration--a total of 287

⁷ Ibid.

individuals⁸--76 of them (26 percent) were dated September 1568 immediately after the outbreak of the third civil war ended the Peace of Longjumeau; 147 (51 percent) are dated between 2 September and 31 October 1572 following the St. Bartholomew's massacres in Paris and the imprisonment of all Huguenots in Dijon; and 34 (12 percent) are dated in July and August 1585 following the Treaty of Nemours, when Henry II capitulated to the Catholic League. This accounts for 257 of the 287 person sample: 89 percent. Thus, there is little question that these abjurations followed immediately after intensive efforts on the part of Catholic magistrates to incarcerate Burgundian Protestants.

The certificates themselves are interesting in their own right, however, for what they do tell us about Catholic perceptions of the Huguenots in their community and what abjuration and reuniting with the Catholic community actually meant. The certificates were drawn up by parish clergy selected by the city magistrates, but they had to be deposited in the town hall with the mayor and council before any prisoner or his property could be released. So although there is a clerical signature on each document, it appears that the contents of the certificates reflect the sensibilities of the magistrates much more than those of the clergy. One of the most striking features about these certificates, for example, is that explicit references to doctrines, beliefs, and Catholic theology generally are almost wholly absent. In only two certificates from the entire sample of 287 could I find any specific reference to doctrine: the abjurations of a merchant named Thierry Lefevre and a launderer named Jehan du Mattal in September 1568. Lefevre's certificate stated that he understood that "the duty of a Christian

⁸ This includes 175 names on 40 different certificates, all with dates 17-30 September 1568 or 2 September-31 October 1572 [AMD, D 65 (liasse)], and 102 names (not 93 as indicated on the wrapper) on certificates dated between 1560 and 1587 (AMD, D 66 (liasse)).

was to present himself humbly for the sacrament of confession and then for the reception of the very sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ at holy Mass."⁹ Whether it was Lefevre himself or the attending cleric who noticed the mistake, the words "*et sang*" were crossed out. He closed his statement of abjuration by indicating that he believed in "the sacerdotal succession of the [Holy] See since St. Peter" and by swearing to maintain "the name of Catholic, which is to say universal". Du Mattal was the other Protestant who specifically referred to doctrine in his certificate of abjuration. He swore that not only had he never been a member of the Protestant church, but that "he had done his Easter duty as a good Christian should and ought to do". Moreover, he reiterated that his curate and neighbors could all testify to this, and Du Mattal even had them sign at the bottom of his certificate that they witnessed him "*faire ses pasques* (do his Easter duties)" and heard mass together on 3 September in the parish church of St. Michel.¹⁰ These are the only Huguenots in the surviving sample who made any mention of any of the sacraments or the papacy. And if these were the exceptions that prove the rule--the rule that the abjurations had equally consequential social implications as theological--Lefevre and Du Mattal explicitly mentioned the body of Christ and the sacrament of the Eucharist, the communal rite and social ritual that loomed so large over the Catholic social body.

What did the other 285 statements of abjuration say, then, if they did not refer to doctrines or sacraments? The one phrase that occurred over and over again in virtually all the certificates is that each Huguenot promised to "*vivre catholicquement* (to live Catholicly)." And what did living Catholicly mean for the

⁹ AMD, D 65 (liasse), 17 September 1568.

¹⁰ Ibid.

magistrates of Dijon? A few examples make this more clear.¹¹ Paul Barbier, a comptroller, promised "to conduct himself and live peacefully with everyone as he always wanted to do". The baker Claude Pasquier promised "to live Catholicly and according to the statutes and ordinances of our Roman Catholic and mother church," and he also swore that he had never "carried arms against His Majesty nor committed any scandalous act". A book-seller named Pierre Grangier simply affirmed on his certificate "that he had never carried arms nor done anything tending to sedition". A poor, twenty-five year old, infirm male named Jehan de Mouhy simply promised "to live and die" in the Catholic church. Hugues Bourrier, a cobbler in the parish of St. Michel called Pistolet, demanded to be released because "it was more than three years since *he had made any act* in the so-called reformed religion, and that he had always lived Catholicly following the Roman church without any complaint or scandal". Moreover, he promised in future "to live according to the Catholic church and to do service to His Majesty". This poor cobbler closed by begging for mercy, because "he was indigent and without means to live or feed his wife and children by a previous marriage". The merchant Jehan Fronaille affirmed that he wanted "to join the number of faithful Catholics who desired to live and die under the will of God, in his service, and in his church, and to employ his life and earthly possessions for the conservation of His Majesty and the kingdom". And finally, the metal-polisher Thibault de Rochefort denied all those who had testified that he was a Huguenot. "On the contrary," he attested, "he had always conducted himself modestly and Catholicly in the obedience of the Roman Catholic church. And since the beginning of these recent troubles he has always been ready and in arms under the charge of his captain [of the parish] to do service to the king and to the commonwealth whenever they

¹¹ The following examples are all taken from *ibid.*, 28 February 1570-11 October 1572.

were endangered." It was only "heinous enemies and liars" and those of "sinister opinions" who claim he was now a Protestant, and "he would prefer to die than to be thought of as such". He concluded his statement, as so many others had also done, by promising "to live Catholicly as he had done all his life" and by swearing that "he was perpetually committed to make humble and faithful service to His Majesty the king and to the commonwealth, and that he would always be ready to risk the last drop of his blood in order to serve the city of Dijon."

What seems clear from these examples--which are characteristic of the surviving sample of certificates of abjuration--is that the Dijon magistrates appeared to be much more concerned about scandalous acts, seditious behavior, loyalty to the king, and threats to public order than in explicit statements of faith or doctrine. I do not mean to suggest that beliefs were unimportant, only that these beliefs had some very powerful social implications for the bulk of the laity. Whether it was calling the Eucharist *Jean le Blanc* or singing the Psalms publicly in French, these social acts were perceived as violations and profanations of the sacred body social. They also underscore, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Bossy first suggested forty years ago, that for French Catholics religion was much more easily understood as a community one belonged to than a set of ideas one believed in.¹² The definition of being a true member of that community was not so much inner belief as conformity in behavior and outlook: in other words, social relations. What is also interesting about these certificates of abjuration is that many of the Huguenots who signed them and promised "to live Catholicly" further appealed to the Catholic magistrates' own sense of the social

¹² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York, 1963); John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past & Present*. 47 (1970), 51-70; and idem, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985).

order rather than make any further attempt to convince the magistrates of their doctrinal orthodoxy. For example, 32 Huguenots appealed in 1569 to be released "so that they could practice their profession and earn a living for their wives and children, who were in great need", while there were 10 appeals for release on account of sick children.¹³ Again, the emphasis here is on the social implications of confessional strife during the Reformation. So, even to wonder about the sincerity of these abjurations and conversions is to ask the wrong question. These conversions were not about sincerity of belief but about social and political conformity.

All these examples should not lead us to conclude, however, that all Huguenots either abjured, or that they became Nicodemites, conforming outwardly in their public behavior simply to gain their release from prison, though doubtless many did do exactly that. These 287 cases of public abjuration did not represent the entire Protestant community in Dijon. While the number of Huguenots in Dijon in 1562 has been estimated to be maybe as many as 500-600 persons (out of a population of about 15,000), many fled the city at the first sign of suppression by the magistrates.¹⁴ Significant numbers went directly to Geneva, in fact, which was far closer than either Lyon or Paris, French cities with sizable Huguenot congregations. There were also some who remained resolute to their faith and refused to abjure. These were always a minority, as most either fled or abjured and then fled. But some, such as the cobbler Nicolas Hurtault, remained incarcerated for long periods rather than recant their Calvinist faith. Hurtault had been arrested along with his wife in October 1563 when their neighbors

¹³ AMD, D 65 (liasse), undated, but Spring 1569.

¹⁴ For this estimate of the Huguenot population and how it was derived, see Jean Richard, "Les quêtes de l'église Notre-Dame et la diffusion du protestantisme à Dijon vers 1562," *Annales de Bourgogne* 32 (1960), 183-9.

complained that they had been "singing the Psalms of David very loudly in French in their shop".¹⁵ ⁱ Once again, it is a rupture in social relations that was at the heart of the issue. Rather than abjure as so many of his co-religionists did and promise "to live Catholicly," Hurtault stood firm in his faith, at least for a time. Five years later in 1568 he joined dozens of others who abjured in order to be released from prison.¹⁶ ⁱⁱ

Given that the largest number of abjurations in the sample--slightly more than half--occurred in the weeks immediately following the St. Bartholomew's massacres in Paris in August 1572, it is tempting to conclude that these Huguenots, and presumably many of the others as well, could not have sincerely abjured their faith. They either genuinely feared a massacre in Dijon emulating the one in Paris (which did occur in twelve other provincial towns with significant Protestant congregations), or they were pressured to convert with actual physical force. All the surviving evidence suggests, however, that rather than bodily force, the only violence used in Dijon was the seizure of the Huguenots' goods and property and imprisonment. When news of the Paris massacres reached Burgundy on 31 August 1572, Léonar Chabot, count of Charny and lieutenant-general of the province, ordered all Huguenots in Dijon to present themselves to the city magistrates at city hall the following day. The Protestants were then incarcerated in the keep of the château, allegedly for their own safekeeping. When the rumor arrived a day or two later that it was the king's will that all Protestants be killed, both Charny and Pierre Jeannin, a young attorney in the Parlement of Dijon, ordered the *prévôt des maréchaux* at the château not to harm them. Indeed, Jeannin--who would later become significant during the League and even later as a minister of Henry IV--is reported to have uttered the phrase,

¹⁵ AMD, D 65 (liasse), 2 October 1563.

¹⁶ Ibid., September 1568.

"*Il faut obéir les rois lentement quand ils sont en colère* [One should not obey kings too quickly when they are angry]," noting that Roman Emperor Theodosian once regretted killing a large number of Christians in anger. This statement may well be apocryphal, as Jeannin only related it in his memoirs written fifty years later.¹⁷ A massacre in Dijon was averted, however, as the Huguenots in Dijon were kept in prison until the king's will could be more readily ascertained. There was one Huguenot casualty nevertheless, a sieur de Traves who was shot trying to escape on the evening of 21 September. The following day Charny ordered all prisoners released who would sign a statement promising "to live Catholicly," beginning the process of mass abjuration already described above.¹⁸ Thus, to explain the abjuration of nearly 150 Huguenots in Dijon soon after the massacres of St. Bartholomew's night in Paris we need to look beyond bodily force and bloodshed.

It would appear that the motivation to abjure for so many Protestants in Dijon was one of three things: either a genuine fear of repression and possibly a massacre like the one in Paris, a grudging acceptance that the massacres were a divine sign that perhaps God had abandoned the cause of the new religion, or a grim realization that further resistance was inefficacious. Some obviously felt like the Calvinist minister Hugues Sureau, who lamented: "I began to consider it [the massacre] to be an expression of God's indignation, as though he had declared by this means that he detested and condemned the profession and

¹⁷ See Pierre Jeannin, "Discours apologétique fait par M. le président Jeannin, de sa conduite durant les troubles de la Ligue, et depuis sous les règnes du feu roi Henry-le-Grand et du roi à present régnant, 1622," in M. Petitot, ed., *Collection des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France depuis l'avènement de Henri IV jusqu'à la paix de Paris conclue en 1763*, vol. 16, 2nd series (Paris: Foucault, 1822), pp. 128-48.

¹⁸ AMD, B 208, fols. 15v-23r, deliberations of the Hôtel-de-ville, 31 August-22 September 1572.

exercise of our Religion."¹⁹ This was similar to the situation in Rouen, as Philip Benedict has shown.²⁰ And it was also apparently true elsewhere in France as well, as the diary of Claude Haton, a curé in Provins, recorded after the massacres. The Huguenots who survived St. Bartholomew's Day, he wrote, "all went to mass, without being compelled or ordered to go, even though they swore when they [initially] renounced the Catholic Church that they would never go there no matter what commandment was given them and even if they were burned alive; [but now] it seemed as though they had never left or been separated, so cheerfully did they behave, going not by ones or twos but in large groups to sing in the churches."²¹ Although Haton concluded from this that Protestants everywhere were just fickle in their faith, the other sources would appear to offer a different conclusion: that seeing no other alternative, the Huguenots in Dijon, as elsewhere in France, chose, albeit reluctantly, to heal the rift in the body social after the massacres of 1572 by rejoining the community and "living Catholicly". And Denis Crouzet has demonstrated that many Protestants did so out of a genuine fear that the massacres were a sign of the imminent end of the world.²²

What the example of Dijon suggests is that despite a very anti-Protestant culture of hostility toward the Huguenots, extending even to illegal imprisonment and seizure of their property, a bloody massacre was not a foregone conclusion

¹⁹Quoted in Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564-1572* (Geneva, 1967), p. 117. For a greater analysis of this view, see Denis Crouzet, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy: Un rêve perdu de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1994).

²⁰ Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 125-50.

²¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 148.

²² Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 vols. (Seyssel, 1990), especially vol. 2, pp.82-143.

after the news of the massacres in the capital reached the city. What had motivated the city fathers from the beginning of the religious struggle was much more social and political than doctrinal: that is, maintaining the unity of the Catholic community in practice and behavior, as well as maintaining the social and political order. Obviously there were doctrinal implications to these goals, but preventing a breach in the community and maintaining order appear to have been higher on their list of priorities than doctrinal purity. In the end, they managed to achieve both without the bloodshed of a St. Bartholomew's massacre, because their policy of attrition through abjuration had been working so well since 1562. The irony here is that the political policy in Dijon to ignore, or simply not to enforce, the various peace edicts of 1562, 1563, 1567, and 1570, all of which guaranteed the Huguenots some rights and legal protection under the law, ultimately led to the success in Dijon of reuniting the community around the Catholic majority. It was the crown's policy of limited religious co-existence in the series of peace edicts, all designed to prevent violence and civil war, that ultimately ensured their continuation. In the end it was in Dijon, and towns like it all over France, that proved more successful than Paris and the dozen other sites of massacres in 1572 in avoiding violence and bloodshed on St. Bartholomew's Day. I do want to stress, however, that the city officials in Dijon did use force, and what we can only call violence, in the illegal seizure of the Huguenots' property and in imprisoning them. Their efforts to achieve communal conformity in religion did seem to work up to a point, and the strategy does make it clear that religious violence and bloodshed such as in Paris was hardly inevitable. Obviously different political choices by those magistrates in power could result in different outcomes.

But the kind of force used in Dijon to compel religious conformity was not the only way to avoid bloodshed. The fact is that in many communities where

Protestants and Catholics lived together a kind of *convivencia* emerged without any institutional force at all. Gregory Hanlon was one of the first to ask how Protestants and Catholics managed to co-exist and define their respective confessional boundaries in the bi-confessional town of Layrac in Aquitaine at the end of the religious wars.²³ He found an unusual degree of inter-confessional sociability that resulted in relatively peaceful co-existence between Protestants and Catholics in this one town in the seventeenth century, a stability that contrasted sharply with the violence of the religious wars of the previous century. More strikingly, he found that fully ten percent of all marriages in Layrac in the years 1606-36, 1654-63, and 1672-88 were mixed marriages between Protestant and Catholic spouses. Keith Luria has discovered similar results in his analysis of Protestant and Catholic burials in bi-confessional areas. Mirroring Hanlon's conclusions of significant toleration and peaceful co-existence in the seventeenth century, Luria found that there is evidence of significant cemetery sharing between Protestants and Catholics, with sometimes one confession absorbing the local funeral customs and burial practices of the other.²⁴ This did not happen everywhere in France, however. Philip Benedict has shown that in the city of Montpellier in the seventeenth century, perhaps more evenly divided confessionally than any other city or town in France, confessional tensions remained.²⁵ While there was an initial period of relatively fluid religious boundaries in the first decade of the seventeenth century,

²³Gregory Hanlon, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia, 1993).

²⁴Keith Luria, "Separated by Death? Burials, Cemeteries, and Confessional Boundaries in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 24 (Spring 2001): 185-221; and also see Luria's book, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France* (Washington, DC, 2003).

²⁵Philip Benedict, "Confessionalization in France? Critical Reflections and New Evidence," in the same author's *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1559-1685* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2001), 309-325. This article has also been reprinted in Raymond A. Mentzer and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559-1685* (Cambridge, 2002), 44-61. Also see my own article, "Confessionalization Beyond the Germanies: The Case of France" in John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas, eds., *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555-1700: Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan* (Aldershot, 2004, 257-73).

where maybe five to ten percent of all marriages were mixed marriages and numerous inhabitants of both faiths frequently did business across confessional lines, this *convivenca* did not last. Over the course of the century confessional lines hardened as leaders of both communities sought to separate and isolate themselves along more strictly confessional lines, and religious tensions in the city increased as a result. Benedict concludes that in the long run confessionalization in Montpellier worked to separate rather than integrate the two faiths. Thus, all of these examples show that in France local conditions, social structures, and political decisions shaped the outcome of confessional division.

In conclusion, I wish to connect the experiences of religious violence in early modern France with some broader conclusions that may be relevant to the other participants in today's workshop. First, it is clear that the sixteenth century like the medieval period that preceded it was for most of the laity, at least, an age of certainty. Though intellectuals and theologians debated and negotiated the so-called certainties that made up the tenets of Christian faith ever since the first century, most Christians accepted that their duty was to believe rather than to doubt. Indeed, it was this certainty of the existence of the invisible world to come that made Christianity so appealing as a way to cope with the uncertainties and otherwise inexplicable hardships and injustices of the visible world they lived in. Uncertainty, and above all any explicit doubt of the verities taught by any of the Christian churches in the Reformation era, was perceived as dangerous and threatening. We know there were some Europeans who did doubt, however. In France alone, as Thierry Wanegffelen has shown, there were some whose views and understanding of God's truth fit "neither Rome nor Geneva," but remained outside the certain truths of both confessions.²⁶ And they found themselves persecuted by both churches. Moreover, there were many more all across Europe whose beliefs and practices, like the Huguenots in Dijon, were forced to

²⁶ Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève: Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1997).

conform to the magisterial confessional choice of the secular state. Like some of the Huguenots after the St. Bartholomew's massacres, they may have doubted their faith and abjured to another one. Or, like others, they may have doubted the new faith they were constrained to adopt.

Nevertheless, very few Christians in the sixteenth century were willing to doubt religious truth as systematically or as publicly as Michel de Montaigne, the politician turned political philosopher in southwestern France. Though he served as both a judge in the Parlement of Bordeaux and mayor of the city of Bordeaux, Montaigne retired from public life in 1584 to write his famous *Essays*. As he expressed most famously in the essay titled "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," Montaigne asked rhetorically "*Que sais-je* (What do I know)?" For him, "only faith can embrace, with a lively certainty, the high mysteries of our religion."²⁷ But Montaigne also believed that human reason was required. "In the same way we must accompany our faith with all the reason that lies within us—but always with the reservation that we never reckon that faith depends on ourselves or that our efforts and our conjectures can ever themselves attain to a knowledge so supernatural, so divine."²⁸ To be fair, Montaigne doubted all certain truths, not just religious truths, based on his humanist predilection for Greek Pyrrhonism and the Socratic method of criticizing truth. But the religious violence of his day disgusted him. His human reason required him to doubt the certainties that justified killing in the name of religion. To claim certainty was to claim divinity, to know as much as God. "Has that ever been seen more clearly than in France today? Some approach it from this side, some from the other; some make it black, others make it white: all are alike in using religion for their violent and ambitious schemes."²⁹ For Montaigne, then, divine revelation could never be black and white. Religious violence seemed the product of a naïve certainty in God's will, when the only way one could

²⁷ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech (London, 1993 ed.), 492.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 494.

comprehend God's will was through human reason, which compelled Montaigne to doubt any certainty of fully comprehending God. My point today is that despite the varied historical contexts of religious violence across space and time, much of it has been fuelled and continues to be fuelled by the certainty that it was and is divinely ordained. To be sure, an overwhelming majority of Christians of both confessions in the sixteenth century, certain as they were in their beliefs, never resorted to killing in the name of religion. Certainty does not make religious violence inevitable any more than doubt makes religious coexistence inevitable. But certainty does tend to lead to the kind of efforts at maintaining religious conformity that, while preventing a massacre in Dijon, forced several hundred Huguenots to abandon their own religious practices to conform to those of the majority. It was certainly possible for two religious confessions to co-exist peacefully for long periods of time, as many French Protestants and Catholics learned to do after the end of the religious wars, and as some Christians, Muslims, and Jews had occasionally done in medieval Spain. But as long as doubt was perceived as dangerous and a sign of libertine thought unsuitable to a Christian society, those few communities that managed a peaceful coexistence of confessions were always going to be pressured to conform to the one certain, true faith of whoever maintained political hegemony at the time.
