1 . Introduction: Être protestant

Raymond A. Mentzer and Andrew Spicer

What did it mean to be Protestant in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?[1] How did the Huguenots understand and articulate the character of their community? What were the social, cultural and institutional dynamics of the movement between the 1550s, when Reformed churches first set roots in the French kingdom, and the proscription of Protestantism that occurred after 1685? In responding to these and related queries, the present collection draws upon important new and innovative research from leading European and American historians as well as younger, extremely promising scholars. Together, they examine a series of critical subjects ranging from Protestant self-image, forms of religious expression and the construction of identity to processes of petitioning the royalist state and communicating among one another. Other essays explore pacification efforts following the religious wars, the emergence of Huguenot elites, the meaning of physical structures for worship, the nature of ritual, and the institutional frameworks for education, poor relief and military preparedness. Each constitutes an important element in the overall development of the Huguenot world. Who were these French Protestants? What were their collective achievements and frustrations? How does the movement's past continue to resonate, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

Already in the early 1960s, Emile Léonard viewed Jean Calvin's Genevan reform as leading to the creation of a new human type, the *réformé*.[2] More recently, Janine Garrisson's survey of French Protestantism from its sixteenth-century origins to the present addressed anew the issue of Protestant identity. The book's very title, *L'Homme protestant*, reveals her purpose – an attempt to define the meaning of 'being Protestant' in France. No more than a third of Garrisson's study dwells on French

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[1] The title is drawn from J. Garrisson, *L'Homme protestant* (Brussels, 1986).
[2] E. G. Léonard, *Histoire générale du protestantisme*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1961), I, p. 307.

Protestantism's historical chronology: the violent sixteenth century, grad-
ual suffocation in the decades following the Edict of Nantes (1598), the
traumatic 'lost' years after the Edict's Revocation (1685) and a reawake-
ning in the late eighteenth century. The bulk of her analysis focuses
instead on matters of the Reformed understanding of the divine, the
imposition of moral discipline, the role assigned to women in Protestant
society, educational aspirations, provisions for social welfare and the on-
going ambivalent Huguenot relationship with the French state. By way
of conclusion, she underscores enduring pressure, if not persecution.
French Protestants were, and are, a minority that has constantly sought
and pursued strategies for survival in a hostile environment. This reality
has indelibly marked and shaped the community.[3]

By confining the analysis to the earlier part of their history, the six-
teenth and seventeenth centuries, what can be seen as being the defining
characteristics of the Huguenots? What distinguished the *homme protes-
tant* from the mass of the French population? First and foremost the
Huguenots were identified by their religion, its beliefs and forms of wor-
ship. They rejected the traditions of Catholicism, did not attend Mass
and failed to recognize Catholic holy days or celebrate feasts such as
Candlemas and Corpus Christi. The simplicity of their services con-
trasted with the ceremonial of Catholic worship; the temple differed in
its architectural precepts from those of the parish church. Prohibited in
certain cities and relegated from the centres of others, Reformed wor-
ship was set apart spatially from the mainstream by being confined to
designated places, often in the suburbs or more remote locations.[4]

Underlying the visual distinction between the Catholic and the Protes-
tant was the Huguenots' understanding of the church and its relationship
with God. As early as 1536, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published
shortly after he had fled France, Calvin carefully defined this relationship
between God and humanity. The church was a single entity, the Body
of Christ, which united those 'who live together in one faith, hope and
love, and in the same spirit of God'.[5] Scripture provided the means by
which it was possible to identify fellow members of this church:

all who profess with us the same God and Christ by confession of faith, example
of life and participation in the sacraments, ought by some sort of judgment of

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[3] Garrisson, *L'Homme protestant.*
[4] See P. Roberts, 'The Most Crucial Battle of the Wars of Religion? The Conflict over Sites
of Reformed Worship in Sixteenth-century France', *ARG* 89 (1998), 247–50, 257–62; see also
A. Spicer, '"Qui est de Dieu, oit la Parole de Dieu": The Huguenots and their Temples', below.
[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536 edition)*, ed. by F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids,
1975), p. 58.

love be deemed elect and members of the church . . . For by these marks and traits Scripture delineates for us the elect of God, the children of God, the people of God, the church of God . . . But those who either do not agree with us on the same faith or, even though they have confession on their lips, still deny by their actions the God whom they confess with their mouth . . . all of this sort show themselves by their traits that they are not members at present of the church.[6]

This assurance of their relationship with God was not an abstruse theological statement but was a belief that served to reassure the persecuted during the dark days of the wars of religion and was a concept which was recognized and asserted by the faithful. Fellow believers greeted each other as brothers in Christ in their letters; on their temples and homes, inscriptions such as 'Die[u] est avec nous, qui sera contre nous' or 'La paix de Dieu soit en cette méson' openly proclaimed their faith.[7]

The temple was 'La Maison de Dieu' where the Reformed community, through the minister's sermons, heard the Word of God several times a week; four times a year they joined together as the Body of Christ for the Lord's Supper. Their services not only rejected the traditional forms of Catholic worship but reasserted the Calvinist understanding of the Reformed churches. Apart from the Eucharistic differences between the two communities, it was perhaps in their attitudes towards the dying that the two faiths diverged the most in their forms of worship. The honest simplicity of Reformed burial sat in marked contrast to the extensive services and customs that commemorated the Catholic departed. Death was the culmination of the ritual sequence of French Protestantism stretching back to the promise of union of the immortal soul with Christ made in the administration of the Lord's Supper. While not physically present, the departed remained a member of the Body of Christ. However, for Catholics, death was only the beginning of the travails of purgatory and of the journey to achieve salvation. The clear theological distinctions were reflected in these contrasting funeral liturgies, which, of necessity, partly took place outside the church or temple in full view of the local community.[8]

This religious identity was not confined to the temple and worship; it pervaded their lives, for the Huguenots were the children of God. Worship and the way in which they lived could not be divorced as only the

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[7] H. Gelin, 'Inscriptions Huguenotes (Poitou, Aunis, Saintonge)', *BSHPF* 42 (1893), 585; 'Inscriptions concernant l'histoire de protestantisme', *BSHPF* 79 (1930), 484. See also Spicer, '"Qui est de Dieu"' and M. Greengrass, 'Informal Networks in Sixteenth-century French Protestantism', below.

[8] See B. Roussel, '"Enselevir honnestement les corps": Funeral Corteges and Huguenot Culture'.

worthy were permitted to participate in the administration of the Lord's
Supper. The consistory – a supervisory and administrative body com-
posed of pastors, elders and deacons – maintained a keen watch over the
community, investigating and discussing in its weekly meetings all aspects
of an individual's behaviour in the public sphere and at home, even in the
bedchamber. It had responsibility for financial affairs, poor relief and,
most conspicuously, the maintenance of moral standards within each
local church.[9] Such supervision of all aspects of an individual's life set
the Huguenots apart from their Catholic neighbours and made them
accountable to a panel of predominately lay peers.

The willingness to submit regularly to the examination and strictures of
the consistory in an increasingly hostile environment reflects the strength
of the beliefs and commitment of the Reformed community. Remaining
a Huguenot with all the limitations and inconveniences that this caused
became essentially a question of choice.[10] Some have argued that, dur-
ing the course of the seventeenth century, the exercise of discipline was
effectively emasculated with the end of the national synods, which had
served as the final court of appeal. This reduced the effectiveness of
the consistories, which, in turn, became more indulgent in dealing with
those members of the community whose behaviour fell below the ac-
cepted standards.[11] During the 1670s John Locke observed that 'there
was very little piety or religion among their people and that the lives of
the Reformed was [*sic*] no better than that of the Papists'.[12] None the
less, where the Huguenots still formed the majority of the population,
it was easier to exercise discipline, occasionally with the co-operation
of the civil authorities. Although Elisabeth Labrousse concluded that it
was not their morality but their religious practices which distinguished
the Huguenots from their Catholic compatriots,[13] we should not negate
the significance that discipline had over some communities and what it
contributed to the development of their character and identity.

The consistory's role was not solely as a disciplinary body, it also pro-
vided support for the Huguenot community at times of personal crisis.
Through the consistory, the system of poor relief was well organized and

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[9] For further explanation of the consistory's role, see: R. A. Mentzer, '"Disciplina nervus
ecclesiae": The Calvinist Reform of Morals at Nîmes', *SCJ* 18 (1987), 91–115.
[10] H. Phillips, *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-century France* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 206–7.
[11] On the welfare of the community, see M. Dinges, 'Huguenot Poor Relief and Health Care in
the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries'.
[12] J. Lough (ed.), *Locke's Travels in France, 1675–1679* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 94; E. Labrousse,
'Calvinism in France' in M. Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism* (Oxford, 1985), p. 291;
E. Labrousse, *Une foi, une loi, un roi? La Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (Paris, 1985), p. 80.
[13] Labrousse, *Une foi, une loi, un roi?*, pp. 80–1.

provided assistance for the sick, the indigent and the unemployed. The result was an extensive support network for the Huguenots. The consistory often went to considerable lengths to help members of the community. At L'Albenc, in spite of their financial difficulties, the consistory fought hard and at great length for the interests of a widow and her three daughters. The level of support could also extend beyond the congregation; those travelling between churches were assisted, money was raised for troubled communities further afield.[14] This broad umbrella of moral assistance and social welfare provided by the Reformed churches served to foster further a sense of the movement's identity as well as being part of a much wider community than that based solely on the local congregation.

The consistory was the smallest component of institutional structures that extended through the regional colloquies and provincial synods to the national synods. This organization gave coherence to the religious identity of the movement; it provided an institutional framework that served to distance the Huguenots from the broad religious enthusiasm of a range of discontented elements within French society and developed the distinctive character of the emerging churches in the 1550s.[15] The hierarchy of assemblies also served to place clearly the local congregation within the wider network of the Reformed churches. The regional and national meetings offered a forum for the discussion of theological disputes, matters of discipline and practical concerns about the implementation of Reformed beliefs. With its oversight of the Reformed community, the national synod during the early seventeenth century directed the movement and, until 1644, appointed and then confirmed the *députés généraux*, the Huguenots' representatives to the king at court.[16] Concomitant with this structure was an increasing professionalism in the cadre of ministers; the Reformed academies provided training and the system of assemblies attempted to ensure that unsuitable and disreputable individuals were prevented from working within the churches.[17] The informal contacts that were established at these meetings also served to develop a sense of fellowship and support amongst the ministry.[18] The Reformed churches therefore developed as a distinct organization with their own

[14] See Dinges, 'Huguenot Poor Relief'.
[15] See T. Watson, 'Preaching, Printing, Psalm-singing: The Making and Unmaking of the Reformed Church in Lyon 1550–1572', below.
[16] Labrousse, 'Calvinism in France', p. 288.
[17] A. Pettegree, 'The Clergy and the Reformation: From "Devilish Priesthood" to New Professional Elite' in his (ed.), *The Reformation of the Parishes: The Ministry and the Reformation in Town and Country* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 1–21.
[18] See Greengrass, 'Informal Networks'; K. Maag, 'The Huguenot Academies: Preparing for an Uncertain Future', below.

hierarchy and institutions, which were able to define and personify the
activities of the movement.

The religious identity of the Huguenot community extended beyond
the structures of the Reformed church. In the earliest years of the move-
ment before 1562 and once again in the wake of the Edict of Nantes,
there had been a degree of fluidity resulting from the coexistence of both
Catholicism and Protestantism within France. During the course of the
seventeenth century confessional identities hardened, communities be-
came more endogamous and their dealings with Catholics in both the
economic and social spheres changed.[19] The restriction of the profes-
sions open to the Huguenots served to isolate further this group within
the local community. The contrast between the two confessions can be
clearly seen amongst the office-holding elites. While the *chambres de l'Édit*
saw the emergence of Huguenot dynasties dedicated to royal service,
Catholics resisted open-ended commitment, limited their own tenure
on these courts and chose to pursue careers in other administrative and
legal arenas that were open to them. While there were similarities be-
tween these elites, and individuals might meet together on a social level
such as in the academy of Castres, in their professional endeavours they
represented distinct groups within French society.[20]

In some ways it is an artificial construct to discuss the religious aspects
of Huguenot culture in isolation. From the very beginning, religious be-
liefs were entwined with the militancy of the movement. The seizure and
iconoclastic destruction of ecclesiastical buildings, notably churches and
monasteries, during the 1560s engendered alarm and even the oppro-
brium of Calvin due to the defiance of the political order. The capacity
for religious violence was, of course, translated into political violence
over the course of the civil wars.[21] It was a militancy and radicalism,
which was also seen at polemical level, especially in the wake of the St
Bartholomew's Day massacre. Following the massacre, the Huguenots
were prepared to think the unthinkable and to develop political theo-
ries that, although unpalatable for many, justified tyrannicide.[22] In spite
of this, Protestants remained fundamentally loyal to the crown and the

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[19] See P. Benedict, 'Confessionalization in France? Critical Reflections and New Evidence', below.
[20] A. Eurich, '"Speaking the King's Language": The Huguenot Magistrates of Castres and Pau',
     below.
[21] See P. Benedict, 'The Dynamics of Protestant Militancy: France, 1555–1563' in P. Benedict, G.
     Marnef, H. van Nierop and M. Venard (eds.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the
     Netherlands, 1555–1585* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 35–50.
[22] R. M. Kingdon, *Myths about the St Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge, MA,
     1988), pp. 166, 173–82.

established order, even if the French monarchical state upheld the authority of a Catholic church to which they were diametrically opposed. It has been argued that the Edict of Nantes successfully institutionalized this dichotomy, and that the Huguenot movement became isolated from the mainstream of European Calvinism and increasingly introspective and conservative.[23] And yet this Huguenot militancy was not stifled in the decades after the Edict of Nantes. In subsequent years those who adhered to the Reformed faith had a clear choice to make between either loyalty to the king or whether to fight for their religious beliefs and community. This led many Huguenots into conflict with the monarchy in the 1620s, to oppose actively the circumscription of their privileges by the crown and ultimately to resist the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The Huguenots maintained 'a tenacious instinct for survival' which could at times override their innate conservatism.[24]

The *homme protestant* was also defined by the stance taken by confessional opponents. From the very outset, Reformed Protestants sought to respond to Catholic persecution in France by portraying themselves as martyrs of the True Church oppressed for their religious beliefs. As the nature of the persecution changed, so the Huguenots were forced to reassess their self-image. Gradually the movement came to see itself as the victim not just of the Gallican church but of Roman Catholicism as a whole. In doing so it came to place French Reformed Protestantism within the tradition of resistance to the papacy, appropriating the history of the Albigensians as the proto-martyrs of the True Church.[25] However, this representation of Huguenot identity was not confined to polemical debates. From as early as the 1560s, the crown had described the movement as the *Religion Prétendue Réformée* and in 1576 the Edict of Beaulieu ordered that the term was to be used to describe French Protestants in all edicts and legal documents. The Edict of Nantes employed this language and not only did the nomenclature continue into the seventeenth century, it was even more keenly enforced.[26] The term directly challenged the Huguenots' view of themselves as the *Églises Réformées de France*.

It was not merely the name of the movement that was defined by terms of the law; Protestant rights and privileges were all carefully delineated

[23] M. Wolfe, 'Protestant Reactions to the Conversion of Henry IV' in his *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (London, 1997), pp. 384, 389–90.

[24] See A. James, 'Huguenot Militancy and the Seventeenth-century Wars of Religion', below.

[25] L. Racaut, 'Religious Polemic and Huguenot Self-perception and Identity, 1554–1619', below.

[26] A. Stegmann (ed.), *Edits des Guerres de Religion* (Paris, 1979), pp. 53, 101; J. Garrisson (ed.), *L'Édit de Nantes* (Biarritz, 1997); see below, P. Benedict, 'Confessionalization in France?'

through royal edicts. The privileged status of the Reformed dated to 1562 when they had been granted freedom of worship, a concession which although defined in different ways was repeated in all but three of the edicts during the course of the religious wars.[27] None the less, these were concessions that carefully prescribed the places where Protestants could and could not worship, and sought to demarcate their relationship with the Catholic church and the state. The Edict of Nantes and its associated documents provided a further definition of the rights and privileges accorded Protestants and institutionalized their legal existence. Commissions of pacification and *chambres de l'Édit*, in which both Huguenots and Catholics participated, sought to implement these measures.[28] This legal identity was not simply something imposed upon Protestants, it also provided a framework within which the two confessions interacted. The Huguenots from the earliest stages of the movement were prepared to use the law to handle disputes, seek compensation and generally maintain the guarantees of security which they believed were contained in the royal edicts and subsequently the Edict of Nantes.[29] They were prepared to bring cases before the *chambres de l'Édit* and to provide the personnel for them to function properly. This legal system also served to define the basis of the relationship between the crown and the Huguenots, encouraging a sense of conservatism and loyalty to the monarch within the movement. Yet it was this very legal system that served as the means to undermine the Reformed churches and their adherents. The reintroduction of Catholicism into Béarn, the encouragement of bipartisan government and education in the Protestant south as well as the more precise and painful definition of their rights, exploited the legal system ultimately to the detriment of Huguenot interests.

The *homme protestant* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was therefore a complex and contradictory character: at times violent and driven to direct action, on other occasions prepared to work within the legal system; militant, and yet innately conservative and loyal to the crown; the persecuted victim of the papacy and Roman Catholicism but a member of the Body of Christ. These character traits can be traced from the earliest days of French Protestantism and can be discerned in a number

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[27] P. Benedict, '*Un Roi, une Loi, deux Fois*: Parameters for the History of Catholic–Reformed Co-existence in France, 1555–1685' in O. P. Grell and B. Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 75.

[28] R. A. Mentzer, 'The Edict of Nantes and its Institutions', below.

[29] P. Roberts, 'Huguenot Petitioning during the Wars of Religion', below.

of facets of Reformed society and culture. In their examination of the salient institutions and features of the Huguenot world, these essays help to provide a greater understanding of French Protestantism in this period. Although they only represented a minority of the overall population and came to be geographically confined to the south and west of the kingdom, the Huguenots were a significant element in French society. In 1562 France was the first powerful nation state to concede freedom to a religious minority. The terms of the Edict of Nantes of 1598 technically remained in force for eighty-seven years. By exploring what defined and shaped the Huguenot existence and identity, and the movement's relationship with the crown, this volume contributes to the wider analysis of the development of the *ancien régime* as well as to an understanding of persecution and tolerance in the early modern period.

2. Preaching, printing, psalm-singing: the making and unmaking of the Reformed church in Lyon, 1550–1572

Timothy Watson

The rise and fall of the Huguenot movement in Lyon, as conventionally told, presents one of the most spectacular stories of the early French Reformation. In the decades leading up to 1562, it has been estimated that more than a third of the city's population of 60,000 converted to the new faith – yet just ten years later, after the bloody 'Lyon Vespers' massacre of early October 1572, the Huguenot church of Lyon had effectively been stamped out.[1] Looked at more critically, however, the failure of the nascent Huguenot movement to establish itself in Lyon on the base of its apparently remarkable early success raises a number of problems which call into question our whole view of the early history of the French Reformation. What motivated these supposed conversions, and how complete were they? How does one define a potential 'Huguenot' *circa* 1550? How meaningful is such a definition, and does it still hold ten or twenty years later?

The question of definition is complicated by the fact that confessional allegiances in the sixteenth century were fluid and protean. Partly because of this fluidity of context, and partly because of the inscrutability of individual religious choices, historians' attempts to construct models to explain why people converted to a new confession in the sixteenth century have generally proved unsatisfactory – the most convincing analyses generally being the most sceptical with regard to grand theories.[2] Case studies of the religious motivations offered by individuals for conversion, though often extremely illuminating in their own right, tend by their very complexity to evade easy categorization;[3] whereas studies that seek

[1] The standard accounts are A. Kleinclausz (ed.), *Histoire de Lyon*, 2 vols. (Lyon, 1939), I, 'Livre 5: le seizième siècle', and R. Gascon, *Grand commerce et vie urbaine. Lyon et ses marchands*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1971), II, pp. 459–535.

[2] See E. Cameron's discussion in *The European Reformation* (Oxford, 1991), chap. 17: 'Motives for Establishing the Reformation?'

[3] A particularly enlightening double conversion tale is told by Robert Kingdon, 'Problems of Religious Choice for Sixteenth-century Frenchmen', *Journal of Religious History* 4 (1966), 105–12. For