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THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF FRENCH PROTESTANTISM

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The study of the development and transformation of French Protestantism in the sixteenth century presents a situation strikingly related to the contemporary scene. Nowhere is this relationship more clear than on the many foreign missionary fields of the world where Protestant evangelical missions have made such an impact during the past century.

In the evangelization of large unbelieving populations and in the organization and training of indigenous national churches and Christian leadership, a host of vital questions have faced both missionary and national Christian alike. The desirability of highly-developed ecclesiastical organization, the wisdom of seeking the support of sympathetic officials in the local and national governments, the degree of association of the national church with foreign sources of income and power, the use of converted priests and monks in public Christian work are all matters common to the sixteenth century and to our present era. The questions have become no less delicate or crucial with the passage of centuries. The seriousness of the outcome is illustrated by the tragic results which followed 1562 in France. In our modern situation the final outcome is yet to be determined in many areas.

The sixteenth century was "...an age of transition...a period of instability, of rapidly changing concepts, of widening vistas, and of unprecedented innovations."¹ Western Europe experienced the consolidation of the nation-state, the continued rise of the "New Monarchies," the great expansion of the European "money-economy," the declaration of religious reform, the rise and spread of the Lutheran and Reformed faiths, and the revitalization of the Catholic Church through the Counter-Reformation. France, geographically and culturally an integral part of Western Europe, was affected by all of these movements during the course of the century.

In our day the casual student of history might easily forget that the religious question was ever a vital and central one in French domestic affairs. And yet, exactly four centuries ago, that nation was poised on the brink of three decades of civil wars fought ostensibly to

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test whether it were possible for two antagonistic and competitive religious systems, Catholicism and Calvinism, to co-exist in France under the same law and the same king.

Francis I ascended the throne in 1515 and within a year he signed the Concordat of Bologna with Pope Leo X. From the very beginning, then, the crown and the church were formally joined together in a firm union.² At the same time the first faint voices of reform were heard in certain parts of France. These initial voices were those of scholars through whose work the Bible in the vernacular was placed in the hands and hearts of the people of France. The first forty years of the century were times of relative domestic peace. There was fairly persistent persecution of heretical elements, but the main attention of the nation was focused on intermittent foreign wars.³ The "new doctrines" spread especially among the urban and semi-urban segments of the population. In the reign of Henry II this growth became even more prominent and began to affect the upper classes.

In marked contrast to this first period, the last forty years of the century, 1559-1598, were decades of civil war throughout the whole of France. These civil wars are known commonly in history as "the French wars of religion." In these protracted struggles, the nation was rent with bitter fighting and unspeakable atrocities.⁴ Among the most crucial factors responsible for the contrast between the earlier and later periods of French history of this century was a transformation which took place in the very composition and nature of the French Protestant movement. After having been characteristically pacific and submissive throughout the earlier years prior to 1555, the Protestant party after 1559-1560 had a powerful political and military character.⁵ Prior to 1555, the emphasis in the Protestant party was mainly evangelistic. After 1560 and during the civil warfare, political and religious reform often were almost synonymous.⁶

In large measure this transformation of the Protestant party was accomplished in the six years from 1555 through 1560. Three of the most important factors in the accomplishment of this change will be considered in this discussion. There was the foundation and organization of the local and national Reformed Church of France. Another factor was the influence exercised in French Protestant affairs by John Calvin and Theodore Beza from the Swiss city of Geneva.⁷ The third factor was the rise and expansion of the group of "political Huguenots" within the ranks of the professing Protestant Church in France. They were men who found Protestantism an ideal vehicle for pursuing political, military and social objectives, and in this pursuit spurned spiritual means and ends and the advice of spiritual leaders. Their religious convictions, often dictated by personal and political exigencies, are difficult to assess with regard to their essence and depth. These are three vital factors which contributed to the making of a Protestant movement which by 1562 was willing and capable of opposing the Roman Catholic Church and royal authority in sustained military operations.

RESIGNED MARTYRDOM 1515-1553

During the years from 1515 to 1553, French Protestantism assumed a definite doctrinal position and repeatedly displayed unswerving loyalty and obedience to God and King, in that order. At the same time the nation of France as a whole experienced serious changes in the

domestic balance of power which set the stage for civil conflict in the latter half of the century.

Francis I succeeded his father-in-law, Louis XII, in 1515. He brought to the throne of France a dominant personality, but also a dissolute one. He ruled a rich and prosperous nation.⁸ In the initial years of his reign, France was undergoing an intellectual revolution which caused increased interest on the part of educated Frenchmen in academic and religious developments in other countries, less patience with the glaring abuses of the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, and more openness to unorthodox theories and doctrines especially of a mystical nature.⁹ Francis I was reasonably sympathetic to an emphasis on education and intellectual exploration. Due to the influence of his sister, Margaret of Angoulême, and to his own inclination to some vague ecclesiastical reforms, the king hesitated to adopt a definite policy with regard to the reforming elements until after 1534.¹⁰

Meaux, a city situated on the Seine River some forty miles upstream from Paris, became the early center of the reforming movement. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (Faber Stapulensis) is recognized as the initial herald of Protestantism in France. He advocated two "proto-Lutheran" ideas: that works have no merit apart from the grace of God and that there is the real presence of Christ but no transubstantiation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.¹¹ One of d'Étaples' former students became Bishop of Meaux in 1516 and invited his old professor to join him there. Around these two men at Meaux there gathered a group of young men including William Farel. They were intent upon reforming the Catholic Church in order that it might conform with the teaching of the Scriptures.¹²

In 1521 the faculty of the Sorbonne condemned Luther and his writings.¹³ Two years later the New Testament in French was finished and published by d'Étaples. Then the storm began to break. The reformers at Meaux were forced to disperse and many found refuge in Strasbourg. But the New Testament in French and other of their writings and Luther's remained and circulated among the common people after their flight.¹⁴ After 1525 the outright protection of reformers by Margaret of Angoulême and others of the royal family began to wane. During the following seven years the attitude of the king toward Protestantism vacillated between favor and fury. By June, 1540, the royal vacillation had been replaced by a determination to prove the orthodoxy of the French throne by thoroughly purging the kingdom of heretics of all kinds.

In the twenty years preceding 1555, Protestant teaching and faith spread throughout every province in France, with the exception of Brittany. This penetration was accomplished quietly and mainly on the basis of personal witnessing and small-scale evangelization. The best available evidences indicate that Protestantism, by the beginning of the reign of Henry II in 1547, had advanced most in the urban areas and among the ranks of the common people, such as small tradesmen, artisans, servants and petty officials.¹⁵ Most of the nobles that were affected went into exile in Germany or Switzerland. Theodore Beza's life is a clear illustration of this pattern.¹⁶

John Calvin fled from Paris and then from France in the years immediately following 1534. In 1541 he published his Institutes of the Christian Religion in French and from this

point on the leadership of the Protestant movement in France passed into the hands of "The Reformer of Geneva." The Institutes provided for the Protestants of France a logical and thorough statement and explanation of the Reformed position. It also provided a model for ecclesiastical organization. Yet they gained more than just this, for Calvin maintained an active correspondence with various individuals and congregations.

The honor of having the first formal Protestant church in France belongs to Meaux in 1546, but due to its very short existence the church organized in Paris some nine years later is commonly referred to as the first official Protestant church in France. In the fall of 1546 on October 4, the Parlement of Paris (the supreme judicial body of France and not to be confused with the representative assembly or "parliament" of contemporary England) issued a warrant of arrest against fifty-seven Protestants of Meaux describing them as "Lutherans."¹⁷

In France there was great variety in the terms used to designate Protestants. The more common and more popular term in the years before 1560 was "Lutheran." The term "Huguenot" came into widespread use at the time of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560. It has continued to the present as the almost universal term applied to members of the Reformed Church of France. The origins of this term remain extremely obscure despite extensive research.¹⁸

Despite severe persecution "the new doctrines" continued to spread, finding especially strong response in southern and western sections of France. The death of Francis I and the beginning of the reign of his son, Henry II, in 1547, led only to an intensification of the persecution of Protestant believers.

A series of developments earlier in the century had drawn the entire House of Bourbon into disrepute. Charles of Bourbon, former Constable of France, had been forced to flee the country. Nevertheless his sons were still "Princes of the Blood," i.e., members of the second royal family in the realm and cousins of the king. The three Bourbon brothers were Antoine, who became King of Navarre as the husband of Jeanne d'Albret, Charles, the Cardinal of Bourbon, and Louis, the Lord of Conde.

In reality the two most influential families at the French court in this century were those of the House of Montmorency and of the House of Guise. The House of Montmorency was led by Anne of Montmorency, a man of considerable ability who was Marshal of France, Grandmaster of the Palace, and Constable. The Chatillon family was related to that of Montmorency and included three brothers who figured very prominently in the affairs of France during the second half of the sixteenth century: Odet, the Cardinal of Chatillon; Gaspard of Coligny, later Admiral of France; Francis of Coligny, the Lord of Andelot and commonly known as "D'Andelot." These three men were nephews of Constable Montmorency.

The House of Guise was represented by the six sons of Claude of Guise. The two elder brothers, who were the more prominent, were Francis, the Duke of Guise, a fine military leader, and Charles, at first Cardinal of Guise and later Cardinal of Lorraine, a brilliant but unscrupulous individual. The House of Guise straddled the two great political powers of

the century in Europe. Some of its lands were held from the Holy Roman Empire, while others were subject to the King of France. This lack of definite national loyalties led the Guises to place themselves at the head of the somewhat international Catholic Party in France.¹⁹ The rivalry between the Guises and the Montmorency faction was of critical importance in the reign of Henry II and in the years after his death.

French Protestantism by the middle of the reign of Henry II had grown to proportions which required and received the most active repression and persecution on the part of the royal government.

There is no movement in history more diverse, more complex in its origins, its basic forces and its divisions; moreover there has never been anything more national or local than the French Reformation, as one can view it before the permanent constitution of the churches and the outbreak of the civil wars, which made all the subdivisions fall...²⁰

ORGANIZATION AND PENETRATION 1553-1559

If the years prior to 1553 formed predominantly "a period of resigned martyrdom" for French Protestantism, the last half of the reign of Henry II can be described as a period of organization and penetration.²¹ Formal church organization spread rapidly, the number of Protestant believers increased substantially, the number of noble and socially prominent Protestants grew, and the influence and role of Geneva in French Protestant affairs expanded. Each of these developments progressed steadily and reached something of a climax during the first half of the year 1559. At this point the unexpected death of Henry II in July, 1559, plunged the nation into a severe crisis. In the midst of this crisis, these trends in Protestantism coalesced to provide the basis for the politically militant role filled by Protestantism in the three years which intervened between the death of Henry II and the outbreak of civil warfare in 1562.

Local Organization on a National Scale

During the years from 1534 to 1553, the Protestant ranks were filled mainly by small tradesmen, artisans, domestic servants, petty officials, and laborers. Yet the lives and testimonies of these simple Protestant believers and, often, martyrs were not without power.²² In fact, during the spring and summer of 1554 the congregations in many of the cities of France continued to grow despite, and in some cases as a direct result of, increasing persecutions.

Calvin, throughout these years, maintained a faithful correspondence with certain of the congregations. At the end of the summer of 1554, he wrote a letter of advice and exhortation to his brethren in the province of Poitou in western France. The text of this letter is very characteristic of his French correspondence of these years. He exhorts them to their double duty of assembling together in holy, secret meetings and yet of publicly professing the Gospel without fear or dissimulation. He also advises them to follow up any sympathy or openness

manifested by any of the noble or aristocratic class. Finally, he warns them to observe in their speaking and acting that delicate balance between caution and boldness which is divinely ordained and must be maintained.²³

At the close of the summer of 1555 the Protestant congregation in Paris elected a minister and chose elders (anciens) and deacons (diacres). Thus the Church of Paris was formally constituted "in all respects conforming to the example of the primitive Church in the time of the Apostles."²⁴ In the formation of their consistory, the Protestants of Paris followed the organizational model recommended by Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion.²⁵ Before the end of the year, churches had been organized in Meaux, Angers, Loudun, Poitiers and a number of other cities. In almost each instance a minister was sent from Paris or Geneva to assist in the formal organization. As a result the form of organization adopted by these churches was very similar to that of the Church of Paris with the "consistoire" as the basic unit.

The persecutions continued without abating during the months of organization and on into the following year. Calvin's counsel was still to assemble secretly and continue unobtrusive evangelization. 1556 and the first half of 1557 was a period of further Protestant ecclesiastical activity. New churches were established and the number of pastors dispatched from Geneva increased sharply.²⁶ Of course there were setbacks mixed with advances for the Protestant cause in 1557.

In the second week of August, 1557, the French forces of Henry II met the Spanish troops of Philip II in the Battle of Saint Quentin on the northern border of France. The French were completely defeated, St. Quentin was captured and Gaspard of Coligny, First Admiral of France, was captured and imprisoned by the Spanish.²⁷ For the Protestant cause there were serious direct results. In Paris the rumor developed that somehow Protestant sedition and treachery had been responsible for the defeat. This rumor led to strong anti-Protestant feeling in the city and ultimately to the anti-Protestant incident known as the "Affair of rue St. -Jacques."²⁸

On the evening of September 4 between three and four hundred persons of all ages and social levels gathered in a building on the rue St. -Jacques near the Sorbonne. An alarm was turned in by several of the more zealous and suspicious of the Catholic authorities of the university. The building was surrounded by armed men and a large, unruly crowd. Some of the Protestant worshippers escaped safely, while those that remained were finally arrested and led to prison amidst a torrent of vocal and physical abuse from the crowd. This incident led to mobilization of forces on the part of both Protestants and Catholics.²⁹

The "Affair of rue St. -Jacques" is a very convenient and appropriate point on which to divide a discussion of the final four years of the reign of Henry II. The first two years of widespread ecclesiastical organization were completed. Henry's dreams of a convincing victory over the forces of Philip II of Spain were shattered at St. Quentin. The popular indignation and suspicion against the Protestants in Paris materialized with brutal harshness in the arrests of September 4. Finally, this "Affair" and events in the following three months vividly

illustrated the increasing importance of the aristocratic or noble element within the ranks of those Frenchmen who professed and sympathized with the Reformed Faith.

Penetration of the Upper Classes

The "Affair of rue St. -Jacques" was directed against the Protestant congregation of the capital of the nation. Several of its pastors were noblemen, Francis de Morel and Antoine de la Roche-Chandieu, and the persons arrested included men and women of distinguished rank. These developments served to intensify the feeling of the king and his court that the Protestants were rapidly becoming an organized group capable of political as well as religious activities and purpose.³⁰ Calvin displayed the same awareness in his words of explicit caution addressed to the congregation in Paris:

And indeed better it were all involved in ruin, than that the gospel of God should be exposed to the reproach of aiming men to sedition and tumult; for God will always cause the ashes of his servants to fructify, but excesses and violence will bring with them nothing but barrenness.³¹

By its numerical growth alone the Protestant movement was assuming alarming proportions in foreign as well as French estimation.³² Lucien Romier estimates that by 1558 "there is room to believe that one-third of the inhabitants of the kingdom had been detached from the Roman Church."³³ It is not, however, legitimate to presume that all of these disaffected persons were actually active members of Reformed churches.

In Paris the believers were becoming increasingly bold and crowds of persons began collecting regularly in a public area of the Sorbonne and there joined together in the singing of psalms which had been translated into French by Clement Marot earlier in the century. These crowds regularly included members of the highest nobility.

Henry II, already suspicious of the activities of many of the nobles and even of the "Princes of the Blood," was led to consider these gatherings seditious and conspiratorial. He declared them illegal and the Reformed leaders advised their brethren to observe the royal order.³⁴ Nevertheless, Antoine of Bourbon, the first "Prince of the Blood," and his younger brother, Louis of Condé, were now known as protectors of the Calvinist population.

Very shortly thereafter another leading family was dramatically identified with the Protestant cause. The family of Coligny of the House of Chatillon was committed through the activities and profession of Francis of Coligny, Lord of Andelot. In the spring of 1558 this young man, who was the colonel in charge of all infantry within the borders of France, was attacked and denounced by the Cardinal of Lorraine. D'Andelot was called before the king to face a four-fold charge of complicity with the outlawed Protestants. He frankly admitted the truth of the charge, but maintained his loyalty to the crown. He was immediately arrested and imprisoned in Melun to the south of Paris.³⁵ He remained firm in his confession and carried on an amazing correspondence with the Protestant leaders in Paris and in Geneva.³⁶

D'Andelot had admitted before the king that he had transmitted books printed in Geneva

to his brother, Admiral Coligny, while the latter was imprisoned by the Spanish. Admiral Coligny had earlier shown definite sympathies with the Reformed beliefs. Then, languishing in a Spanish prison and reading the books sent by his younger brother, he found the faith and certainty which was to carry him through to his infamous death in 1572 as the most consistent and righteous of the Protestant military and political leaders.³⁷ Thus the Chatillon brothers, nephews of Constable Montmorency, were publicly identified as adherents and protectors "de la religion."

The condition of the nobility in France at this time gives these professions special significance. Economic changes as well as other changes during the sixteenth century had drastically undermined the position of the vast majority of the noble class. As a result the mass of the French nobility began to turn from dependence upon the crown in search of other objects for its allegiance. The natural alternatives were the great lords and the great noble families of the realm.³⁹ The Houses of Bourbon, Guise, Montmorency and the related House of Chatillon were the greatest of these feudal families. At this very time, as shown in the preceding discussion, the leading members of two of these four families were professing the "new doctrines."

While these events were taking place in Paris and among the nobles of the kingdom, the evangelization of France continued at an accelerated pace. In the years 1558 and 1559, the number of pastors dispatched from Geneva reached its peak.⁴⁰ There were notable conversions among the Catholic clerical and monastic ranks.⁴¹ New churches were organized in many more towns and cities.⁴² A national synod or assembly of all the Reformed pastors to agree upon "a common statement of doctrine and discipline, conformable to the word of God" was now ready to be proposed.⁴³ This synod convened on May 26, 1559, in the midst of the hearings and investigations in the Parlement of Paris. A confession of faith and an ecclesiastical discipline were composed which are worthy of close study.

The confession of faith is in many respects similar to the statement which Calvin formulated and sent to Henry II in October, 1557.⁴⁴ There is expressed the distinction and balance between obedience to earthly authority and heavenly authority.⁴⁵ In the final two articles the principle of civil obedience is firmly defined. Furthermore it is stated that those of the Reformed Faith "detest all those who do reject the Higher Powers" and who advocate communal holding of possessions and goods and who subvert justice.⁴⁶

The ecclesiastical discipline is detailed and very strict in its terms. Especially severe are measures directed against anyone who caused scandal or sedition to be charged against the church by violating in any way civil regulations. However, while the civil magistrate's authority is emphasized, the ecclesiastical magistrate is declared to be without authority or power.⁴⁷

The bequest of this initial national assembly is considerable. It includes a confession of faith adopted with unanimous approval, a detailed and strict church discipline, and finally the highly successful ecclesiastical structure based on the consistory. It is this structural hierarchy which is said to have shown special adaptability to political, military and financial, as well as religious organization.⁴⁸

The rumors of the secret meetings of the national synod in Paris and the clear indications of the continued growth and expansion of Protestantism in every part of the realm convinced Henry II that even more drastic steps were required to stem and to eradicate the heresy. That he planned to take such steps is certain.

"The King of France is dead!" On June 30, 1559, a splinter from a shattered lance accidentally entered the king's forehead. The freak injury occurred in a tournament held in honor of the much heralded marriages between the French and Spanish royal families. After ten fateful days Henry II died and three years of crisis were inaugurated which were followed by nearly four decades of civil war.⁴⁹

The last half of the reign of Henry II were years in which French Protestantism assumed a new internal composition and organization which served to frighten the royal and Catholic authorities and, at the same time, to greatly embolden the growing number of Protestants within France.

CONSPIRACY -- PRELUDE TO CIVIL WAR 1559-1560

The changes and developments which we have described and analyzed thus far gave to the French Protestant movement a potential for political action which began to be realized and explored during the short reign of Francis II. With regard to religious movements in general and French Protestantism in particular, Edward Armstrong has formulated a basic principle:

Every great religious or spiritual movement is likely, sooner or later, to take a political direction. It will associate with itself the aspirations and the grievances of classes which are oppressed; it will serve as a help, more often as a hindrance, to the actual government.⁵⁰

Francis II ascended the throne as an adolescent in his fifteenth year. He inherited a kingdom which was far from untroubled. The spread of the Protestant heresy was reaching dangerous proportions. The heretics hailed the death of his father as a definite act of God's hand on their behalf.⁵¹ The young king's mental and physical constitution was not overly strong. His wife was the beautiful Mary, Queen of Scots, a niece of the Duke of Guise and the Cardinal of Lorraine. The control of the king by these two men was early established. The mother of the king, Catherine de Medicis, appeared to be in a prominent position but not yet strong enough to oppose the influence of the Guise brothers.⁵²

The King of Navarre's behavior at court in September, 1559, was very disappointing for many of his supporters. In return for vague promises about the future of his holdings in Navarre, he agreed with the Guises not to force the issues of the king's minority, his regency and the convocation of the Estates-General.⁵³ This caused many of the Protestants and other anti-Guise elements to put their hopes and confidence in his younger brother, Louis of Bourbon, Lord of Condé. This ambitious young prince possessed only a little money and property but he was rich in boldness. The rising feeling against the Guise administration stimulated definite plans in which Louis of Condé was deeply involved.⁵⁴ There is little doubt that a significant amount of this discontent was due to the way in which the Guise family was domi-

nating Francis II to the exclusion of the Bourbon, Montmorency, and Chatillon families.⁵⁵

With the Guise brothers in power, the persecutions aimed at the Protestants increased in intensity and extent. In the midst of these terrible persecutions, Calvin wrote to the brethren in Paris and in the whole country to remind them that persecutions were from the Lord and thus were designed to try the believer's constancy and his firmness of faith. Trials, even bitter ones, were not to be avoided or resisted with physical force.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, inspired and supported by Louis of Condé, the actual organizational work of a complex conspiracy was placed in the hands of an individual called Jehan du Barry, Lord of Renaudie. He traveled in many parts of France seeking to gain noble support for a military attempt to free the young king from the domination of the Guise family. He used a familiar line of argument based on the need for the king to be directed by the "Princes of the Blood" and for an assembling of the Estates-General.⁵⁷ Renaudie also traveled extensively outside of France contacting French nobles in exile. After several months of careful planning the stage was set.

In the spring of 1560 the "Conspiracy of Amboise" was put into operation. An attempt was made to seize the king and his court and to arrest the Guise brothers. The latter had been warned and the attempt was foiled. A large number of the conspirators were arrested and many, including Renaudie, were killed or executed immediately. Despite the very bloody and successful repression of the conspiracy by the Guises, much of their confidence was shaken by the whole affair. Louis of Condé was implicated in the conspiracy, but cleared himself in a dramatic audience before the king himself by a bold denial of any involvement.

The purpose of the conspiracy was defended as having been completely loyal to the king's person and to the legitimate estate of the kingdom, having been aimed solely at the "usurping foreigners."⁵⁸ Yet the whole affair served perfectly in the hands of the opponents of the Reformed Faith to confirm the charges of sedition and conspiracy which had been made repeatedly against the Protestants. Though Calvin protested his innocence, the pastors from Geneva had been implicated.⁵⁹

The term "Huguenot" came into very common use right at this time and was never dropped. Whatever its origins, the term had definite political overtones and thus may stand for the political appearance and character which the Protestant movement assumed through the Conspiracy of Amboise and subsequent events.

In hopes of quelling these uprisings and various literary attacks on the court and of preventing civil war, the Guises, Catherine de Medicis and L'Hospital, the new Chancellor, decided to call the Estates-General to meet in December, 1560, and a meeting of the nation's religious authorities for the following month. Almost immediately new Protestant and anti-Guisard agitation broke out.⁶⁰ Provoked by such outbreaks, Francis II and the Guises summoned Antoine of Bourbon and Louis of Condé to appear at the court in Orleans where the Estates-General were scheduled to meet in December. When Antoine and Condé arrived in Orleans, Condé was arrested and Antoine was placed under virtual house-arrest. The game seemed to be up when Condé was tried and condemned to death on November 26.⁶¹

Suddenly the "boy-king" fell critically ill and on the night of December 4, Francis II died. The next day his younger brother, Charles IX, was declared King of France.⁶² To the Protestants the death of Francis II seemed to be the work of a merciful God even more clearly than the death of his father. The execution of Condé was postponed and the Protestants realized that Antoine of Bourbon was in the best possible position to assume full control of the situation and of the country. However, Antoine ceded his "right-to-regency" to Catherine de Medicis in return for some assurance about his possessions as King of Navarre.⁶³ The splendid opportunity was lost and the destiny of France was placed into the eager hands of the devious Catherine.

The short reign of Francis II was a time of varying fortunes as far as the Huguenots were concerned. Through all these events and the uncertainty of the situation, the political inclinations and interests of the French Protestants were encouraged to develop. Among the common people the believers continued to grow in number and were led into bolder, iconoclastic activities. The Protestant leaders were led to put a growing confidence in the roles played by certain great nobles who came to represent Protestant interests. The "political Huguenots" were encouraged to conspiratorial activities by the continued numerical growth of the Protestant party, the affiliation of certain great nobles with the movement, the rising wave of anti-Guisard feeling throughout the nation, and the fluid and unstable condition of the throne. This period of conspiracy was indeed a prelude to devastating civil war.

CONCLUSION

The Protestant party in the years before 1553 was primarily a persecuted religious minority group. It faced the opposition of both civil and religious authorities. Its adherents submitted passively to severe persecutions and libelous slanders due entirely to their profession of the Reformed Faith. By the end of 1560, the Reformed Church in France presented a very formidable appearance to Catholic and royal authorities as a result of the developments discussed previously. The movement's numbers had increased greatly and it now possessed an efficient religious administrative organization at all levels which obviously could be adapted to serve political, military, and financial purposes. It was directed by dozens of ministers trained in Geneva and through Calvin it had contacts with strong foreign governments whose sympathy and willingness to intervene diplomatically had been manifested time after time. Finally the movement had established itself among several of the leading families in France and had the support of a large portion of the lesser French nobility, who combined to attempt to dislodge the ruling Guise family from its place of power behind the throne of the king. Among the bitter fruits of this development and transformation of the Protestant party were more than three decades of the most terrible civil strife in the history of France, and, ultimately, the virtual extinction of Protestantism in France.

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