THE HUGENOTS: THE REFORMATION IN FRANCE NO. 4

THE REVOCATION OF THE EDICT OF NANTES (1685)

Prayer
Scripture: Ezekiel 43:6-12
Hymn: 455 "O for a Faith that Will Not Shrink"

THE REIGN OF HENRY IV

The Edict of Nante was a landmark in the history of the slow painful growth of religious liberty. Although it was dictated more by pressing political need than by deep religious conviction, it set France in strong contrast with the countries where only one religion was tolerated and where minorities had no right to worship. The eighty-seven years of the Edict of Nantes in France was a period for testing whether a man could be a good citizen though his religion was not that of his king. Throughout most of Europe the prevailing ideal was "one king, one law, and one religion." It was an almost universal political dogma that unity of religion was necessary to the welfare of the state.

The same year, 1598, that the Edict of Nantes was proclaimed, Henry IV concluded the Treaty of Vervaine (May, 1598) with Spain. The peace that followed gave the King of France an opportunity to turn his attention to the welfare of his kingdom that had been ruined by more than thirty years of civil and foreign wars.

THE REBUILDING OF FRANCE:

The French government was nearly bankrupt. Many country districts lay in ruin and were uncultivated. Towns had been destroyed. Roads had been neglected and bridges destroyed. Discharged soldiers had become highwaymen and pillaged and robbed. Trade had dwindled and artisans were idle. Noblemen asserted old medieval rights and ignored or disobeyed the king.

Henry IV proved himself a strong and energetic king. His concern for the welfare of his kingdom earned him the title of "Good King Henry." He would tolerate no disloyalty or disobedience. Close friends knew that he was selfish and vain but he worked hard. The king was wise in administration. He was well served by his chief minister, Maximilien de Bethune, Duke of Sully, an honest and efficient Huguenot friend. Their firm rule laid the foundation of divine-right absolutism in France but was supported by the majority of the French people because it brought relief from the years of bloody rivalries. Henry IV refused to call any meetings of the Estates-General that had been hostile to him. He reduced the political influence of the nobles by using middle class officials in his government. He made their positions in the Parlement of Paris hereditary, creating a nobility of the robe. He chose and promoted men on the basis of their qualifications and record rather than giving offices to royal favorites. Royal officials were placed over the towns. He increased the efficiency of the central government by reducing the size of the royal council to twelve who were experts in law and finance. The Parlement of Paris was allowed to register and criticize royal decrees but he tolerated no political opposition.
Sully was given general oversight of financial affairs. He made tours of inspection throughout the country. He carried out extensive reforms in royal finances. Provincial governors were forbidden to raise money on their own authority. He reformed the tax-collecting to remove abuses. His policy of retrenchment in expenditures made great savings. He reduced the subsidies to artists and grants to favorites. He greatly reduced the standing army, maintaining a force just sufficient to control rebellious nobles.

King Henry IV and Sully worked to bring back economic prosperity to France. Sully believed the welfare of the nation depended on its agriculture. He supervised the building of new farm-to-market roads, the building of bridges, the draining of swamps, the digging of a network of canals, and the protection of the farmers from roving bands of robbers. He abolished interior customs and encouraged the free circulation of grain and farm products. He subsidized stock-raising. The King improved the lot of the middle class by encouraging new commercial enterprises. Silk worms and mulberry trees were introduced and the silk industry became one of the most important in France. Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles became great commercial centers. The French merchant marine was built by royal bounties. The building of a French navy was encouraged and France began to compete with Spain, England and Holland for trade. Trading posts were established in India. Champlain was despatched to the New World to lay the foundations of a French colonial empire. French settlements were made in Port Royal and Quebec in 1608.

PROTESTANTISM AND CATHOLICISM UNDER THE EDICT OF NANTES.

The edict did not work perfectly and was difficult to enforce. The legal safeguards in the edicts were evidence of insecurity. Some on both sides considered peace the ultimate consideration and therefore welcomed the edict. Some Huguenots could not forget the King had changed sides and chafed at any restraints and limitations on their liberty. Many Catholics were determined that Protestantism should not be recognized. The Archbishop of Tours and many bishops called for prayers that heresy not be recognized. Pope Clement VIII declared "...I am most grieved and disconsolate....I see the most cursed edict that I could imagine, ...whereby liberty of conscience is granted to everyone, which is the worst thing in the world.... I shall become the laughing stock of the world." The university refused to admit Protestant students nor would it allow Protestant professors. In some parts of France the edict was evaded for several years. At Huguenot doors Catholics sang a ditty about a Catholic girl's cow wandering into a Huguenot worship service. Some bloodshed continued and more bad feeling. A Huguenot synod of Gap (1603) reaffirmed its belief that the Pope was the Anti-christ. There were bright spots. At Castlemoron Catholics and Huguenots agreed to share a parish cemetery and belfry. In 1601 Huguenots were allowed two deputies-general at court to report breaches of the Edict. The king transgressed the Edict by allowing Parisian Huguenots to build a great church at Charenton nearer the city than the statutory five leagues.
The organization of the Huguenots under the Edict separated them more and more from the Catholic population and made them a defensive party. Their organization was not only a church but also a political and military organization. Many Huguenots were more concerned for the political and military than for the religious. Many Huguenots prospered and became leaders in industry, commerce, and in the professions. As a whole they were better educated than the mass of the Catholics. They had an influence in France that was greater than their numbers. The temptations and evils that grew out of maintaining their political and military organization began to cool religious zeal and the attractiveness of the movement. Decline in conversions set in and the rate of apostasy increased.

THE ASSASSINATION OF HENRY IV (May 14, 1610):

As soon as a measure of peace and prosperity had been restored in France, Henry IV began to make French influence felt in European affairs. He and Sully had great plans for making France the head of a "republique chretienne" for the promotion of peace and order in Europe. He backed the Protestants in the Netherlands against Spain. He allied himself with German princes against the Hapsburg emperor of Austria. He revived French claims in Italy. His great plans came to nothing when he was assassinated on a street in Paris on May 14, 1610, by a Catholic fanatic, Francois Ravaillac, who believed the King was planning to make war on the pope.

THE HUGUENOTS UNDER LOUIS XIII (1610-1643):

Upon the assassination of Henry IV, his widow, Marie de' Medici, became regent for her nine-year-old son, Louis XIII. The regent was ambitious but proved incompetent. She dismissed Sully and surrounded herself with worthless favorites. She became the tool of one of her favorites, a Florentine, Concino Concini. They spent lavishly and distributed offices and gifts freely. Soon the treasury was empty. Rebellious nobles, both Catholic and Huguenot, hated her and saw an opportunity to regain privileges and power. Huguenots feared her rigid Catholicism and soon came to hate her. She yielded to pressures from the Spanish party and sought rapprochement with Spain. She arranged the marriage of her son, Louis XIII, to Anne of Austria, the daughter of Philip III of Spain. Her daughter, Elizabeth, was married to the son of Philip III, who would become Philip IV. This rapprochement with Spain terrified the Huguenots.

Faced with a grave financial crisis and growing restlessness among the nobles, the Regent called a meeting of the Estates General in 1614. The three estates could not agree among themselves; they refused to grant the subsidies the regent requested. The clergy and nobles would not tax themselves and refused to cooperate with the commoners, the third estate, many of whom were Huguenots. The commoners despised the clergy and nobles and had little sympathy with the peasants who formed the bulk of the French nation--most of the peasants were Catholic. The commoners strongly disapproved the Spanish policy of the Regent. After three fruitless weeks the regent dismissed the Estates General, saying that she needed the assembly hall for a dance. The Estates General would not be
called again for 175 years— not until 1789.

The Regent and her favorites faced a series of revolts by nobles and Huguenots. France was torn between two parties struggling for control of Europe. On one side was the party of Counter-Reformation aiming at the restoration of the position of the Catholic church and the destruction of Protestantism. The Austrian and Spanish Hapsburgs and the Jesuits led this party. The regent and her favorites favored this party. The other party consisted of the Protestant powers that included the Dutch Protestants and the German Protestant princes. The Huguenots actively supported the Protestant party, raising an army and supporting it with funds supplied by the churches. The Huguenots, as a state within a state, conducted their own relations with foreign powers. The first rebellion ended in the Peace of Loudun (May 1616) with the government granting pensions to the nobles. In a second revolt the young king, Louis XIII, sided with the rebels; Concini was murdered on April 24, 1617. Charles d'Albert de Luynes, a young noble, became the favorite. Another rising ended in the treaty of Angouleme (1619). Still another revolt was ended in the treaty of Angers (1620). Luynes died in 1621. In the next three years the regent had three different ministers of mediocre ability.

The unpopularity of the regent's obsequiousness to Spain finally led to the young king breaking with his mother, forcing her into retirement, and to his taking over the government in his own name. Louis XIII chose for his chief minister Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu, from a noble family of Poitou, had been educated for an ecclesiastical career. At twenty-one he was appointed bishop of Luçon. In 1614 his eloquence and wisdom attracted the attention of the regent, Marie de' Medici. She invited him to her court, gave him a seat on the council, and nominated him to be a cardinal. For eighteen years (1624-1642) the pleasure loving king entrusted the governmental affairs to the cardinal. Richelieu promised his king, "I promise to devote all my energy and all the authority that it may please you to place in my hands to destroying the Huguenots, abasing the pride of the great nobles, restoring all your subjects to their duty, and raising the name of your majesty among foreign nations to its rightful place."To fulfill this promise he employed brilliant diplomacy, court intrigue, and merciless cruelty. Richelieu employed middle class administrators, called intendants, to rule the provinces for the crown. Nobles suspected of plotting or rebelling were executed. All castles were ordered destroyed that were not essential to the defense of France. The intendants became known as "The thirty tyrants."

Richelieu could not tolerate a state within the state. He moved against the Huguenots. There could be only one army and one treasury in France. He gave military support to Protestants in Germany as a part of his policy of opposing Spain. In France fortified towns and independent courts and assemblies were contrary to royal absolutism. The Protestants must obey the king. When the Huguenots revolted in 1625 Richelieu crushed them. After a long siege of fifteen months La Rochelle fell and Richelieu quickly crushed revolt in the rest of France. In the edict of
Alais of 1629, the Huguenots were deprived of all fortifications and the right to hold political assemblies. Richelieu left them with freedom of conscience and freedom of worship. They were not to embarrass the government.

Richelieu's policy of giving French support to the German Protestant princes against the Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs greatly raised the international prestige of France. By his death in 1642 the military prestige of France with such generals as Turenne and Condé was beginning to surpass that of Spain. The king, Louis XIII, died the next year (1643).

THE AGE OF LOUIS XIV (1643-1715):

Louis XIII left the government to his five year old son, Louis XIV. Cardinal Mazarin who had been trained by Cardinal Richelieu guided the government. Mazarin was an Italian, born near Naples and educated for an ecclesiastical career at Rome and in Spain. As papal nuncio in Paris he won the favor of Richelieu and was invited to enter the service of the French king. In 1639 he became a naturalized Frenchman. He always spoke French with an unacceptable accent but he served the king and Richelieu so well that he was named a cardinal. As Richelieu's successor he faithfully continued the policies of his teacher. He successfully concluded the wars with the Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs, gaining for France in the peace of Westphalia in 1648, Alsace and territory on the Rhine, a strip of territory from Spain, and also land from the Spanish Netherlands (Belgium).

Some of the nobles and the middle class who resented Mazarin's Italian origin and foreign accent, formed the Fronde that challenged his position at the head of the government from 1648-52. For a time the Fronde gained control of Paris but by 1659 Mazarin was able to restore the authority of the royal government. Throughout the revolt of the Fronde the Huguenots remained loyal to the king. They were praised in a royal proclamation in 1662 by the king who acknowledged that they had given incontestable proof of "their affection and fidelity". The Huguenots were no longer a menace to the Catholic Church. Very few were conspicuous for proselytizing zeal. They had become an important force in the economic life of France and played an important part in France's rise to the forefront of European economic progress and prosperity.

When Cardinal Mazarin died in 1661 the young king, Louis XIV, assumed personal charge of the French government. France was a prosperous state. The old insurrections of Protestants and nobles had been put down and the French people were patriotic and loyal. French prestige was at a new height. Local government was in the hands of the faithful middle class intendants. Louis XIV worked hard at strengthening royal absolutism. His personal life had been wild and sinful which was fairly typical of court life in that age. He continued a loose liver. He was devoted to the doctrine of the divine right of the monarch. His person was sacred and it was blasphemy and sacrilege to attack the king. The king was accountable only to God and was the father of his people. The king was the earthly image of God's majesty and was accountable
only to God.

Louis XIV perfected the governmental system in keeping with his political philosophy. The king determined all policies and all officials were responsible to him. He erected Versailles as the crowning glory of his majesty. He became the great patron of art and literature. He selected Colbert, an extraordinarily talented minister, to oversee domestic affairs. Colbert carried through great financial reforms. Commerce, industry, and agriculture prospered. The royal navy compared favorably with the navies of Spain, England and Holland. The colonial empire grew. The French Academy and the Academy of Sciences acquired great prestige. Louis XIV proved one of the most skillful diplomats of Europe. To oversee military affairs he chose Louvois, one of the greatest war ministers of the age.

Louis XIV entertained the grand dream of the Bourbons replacing the Hapsburgs as the leaders of Europe. The War of Devolution for control of the Spanish Netherlands lasted from 1667 to 1668. French successes led to the formation of the Triple Alliance of England, Holland and Sweden to form a "balance of power" to limit the French king's dreams of establishing "natural boundaries" for France. The Dutch War followed. Louis XIV blamed the Dutch for the Triple Alliance. The Dutch stopped the French advance into the Netherlands but Louis XIV did extend his boundaries closer to the Rhine. The advance of French power led to the forming of the League of Augsburg. Spain, Sweden and some of the German princes formed a league to preserve the Holy Roman Empire. William III of England was drawn into the war against France that lasted from 1689 to 1697. Louis XIV was sixty years old when this war ended. He had not been successful on the sea but had won several victories on the frontier. Only the union of the other powers of Europe halted the expansion of France. Louis XIV had made France the great power of Europe. He had made France the center of art, literature and culture. His age has been styled "The Age of Louis XIV."

The fourth war, the War of Spanish Succession, lasting from 1702 until 1713, was a part of Louis XIV's plans to put Bourbons on the leading thrones of Europe. Philip V, grandson of Louis XIV, was seated on the throne of Spain but on condition that the crowns of France and Spain never be united. France lost important colonies. French patriotism in the war had added to the glory of France. The wars had greatly enhanced the prestige of France but Louis XIV enjoyed very limited success in territorial gains. France was saddled with a grievous load of taxation and debt. Basking in the glory of Versailles the king and his court were only dimly aware of the great suffering of the French people and the great restlessness beyond the capital. Actually France was becoming a sick country.

In spite of the loyalty of the Huguenots in the rebellion of the Fronde, Louis XIV could not accept religious dissent. His belief in royal absolutism demanded a unified people with a single official faith. The Jesuits had insinuated themselves into the confidence of the king. They became dominate in his court. They
made it bad manners to differ with the king in religion. The very existence of the Huguenots was an affront. The king under the influence of the Jesuits began a program of interpreting the Edict of Nantes in the most stringent sense. Little by little the liberties and privileges of the Huguenots were curtailed. The Catholic program was not that of crushing them at a single blow but a program of enfeebling and gradually starving the Protestants by retrenchment of liberties. In 1660 the clergy suggested that the king appoint a commission to investigate the administration of the Edict of Nantes. Liberties were steadily removed. Year by year as the king carried on his wars, ancient privileges were removed and new burdens imposed on the Huguenots. In 1660 a royal edict prescribed sixty ways to harass the Protestants. Almost every phase of their life was affected. Conversions to Catholicism were encouraged and made attractive by a variety of expedients. Economic inducements were offered. Protestants found themselves excluded from all grades of government service.

France's treatment of the Protestants raised vigorous protests from the Protestant countries. Louis insisted the Edict of Nantes was still law. The criticisms were so great that he recalled the edict of 1660, but continued the harassment of Protestants. More and more their position became insecure.

As the king grew older he became more repressive. He was haunted by the sins of his youth. He sought peace of conscience by persecuting heretics. The king's clash with the pope over the rights of the French church only compounded his guilt. His mistress, Mme de Maintenon, who became his unofficial wife, encouraged him in the persecutions. When the Jansenists protested the hollowness and corruption of court life and the worldliness and formality of the clergy and church, these devout Catholics were also bitterly persecuted. A contemporary described the king as "doing penance for his own sins on the backs of the Jansenists and the Huguenots."

The persecution of the Huguenots increased in severity with encouragement from the Jesuits and Catholic clergy. The number of places for public worship was drastically reduced. Huguenot ministers were allowed only in certain places and for brief periods of time. Endowments for charitable purposes were confiscated and turned over to the Catholics. Huguenot hospitals, schools and colleges were closed. A program of destroying Huguenot buildings was launched. Huguenots were barred from learned professions. Huguenot children were taken from their homes and put in Catholic orphan homes on the pretext that the children wished to become Catholic. Troops, called dragonnades, were stationed in Huguenot homes with orders to rape, torture and harass the Protestants until they would turn Catholic. Thousands broke and confessed the Catholic faith. A great exodus of Huguenots from France began.

The Jesuits persuaded the King that the Huguenots were so weakened that they could be easily extinguished by one final blow. In 1685 Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes. All remaining privileges were ended. All ministers were exiled. Lay people who
attempted to leave France were subject to severe penalties. The
dragonnades were increased. Hundreds of Huguenot men were sen-
tenced to the galleys. Huguenots in southern France rebelled.
For twenty years fighting continued until the Huguenots were
finally crushed. Some thirty thousand Huguenots turned Catholic
to save their lives. Over a quarter of a million managed to
escape from France. They fled to Prussia, Russia, England,
America, and Africa. In some places, such as Prussia, they were
welcomed, and made a valuable contribution. They were profes-
sional people and skilled artisans that France could ill afford
to lose. They were excluded from French colonies. In Spanish
colonies they were sometimes brutally murdered, not so much for
being Huguenots as for being Frenchmen.

Huguenots at one time were as much as a fifth or a sixth of
the population of France. By the time of the Revocation of the
Edict of Nantes they had sunk to about two percent of the popula-
tion. They were not completely destroyed. A little remnant
survived but they enjoyed no liberties or toleration until the
French Revolution.

THE FAILURE OF THE HUGUENOTS IN FRANCE:

Protestantism failed to win France. A major cause of its
failure was the failure to win the support of the government.
The hostility of the government doomed the movement. Some think
that Protestantism came late to France when the movement was
beginning to lose force and in many places was beginning to move
into a scholastic creed making period. Probably more important
was the fact that it was challenged by the Counter-Reformation
or Roman Revival just when this movement was at its peak. Jesuits
lead in bringing a great revival of Catholicism to France. The
Huguenots never could win a majority of the population. They
failed to win among the nobles and the peasants and poor of the
cities. Their main successes were among the middle class. An
important factor was that the Huguenot movement was divided among
those who were ardently religious and those who were mainly
political out of a desire to limit the power of the crown. The
political and military activities of these political Huguenots
did much to discredit the movement. A major factor in the failure
of the Huguenots was the hold of the Renaissance in France. The
religious and serious side of the Renaissance tended to remain
in the Catholic church. The pagan and humanistic side of the
Renaissance scorned the religious fanaticism and zeal of Huguenots.
Often it found remaining Catholic a way of life that brought the
least trouble. The great masters of French literature tended to
remain in the Catholic church and to be hostile to Huguenots.
These writers had great influence on the minds of the French people.

Huguenot writers in the field of political philosophy had a
lasting influence in helping to turn the minds of people in many
lands to the rights of the people and the limits and responsibilities
of royal power.