

THE WARS OF RELIGION



On May 23, 1618, a crowd of protesters carried a petition to Prague's Hradecany Palace, where representatives of the royal government of Bohemia were gathered. The crowd stormed into the council chamber, engaged Catholic officials in a heated debate, organized an impromptu trial, and hurled two royal delegates from the window. The crowd below roared its approval of this "defenestration" (an elegant term for throwing someone out a window), angered only that neither man was killed by the fall. Catholic partisans construed their good fortune as a miracle, as the rumor spread that guardian angels had swooped down to pluck the falling dignitaries from the air. Protestants liked to claim that the men had been saved because they fell on large dung heaps in the moat below.

The different reactions to the Defenestration of Prague illustrate how the Reformation left some of Europe, particularly the German states, a veritable patchwork of religious allegiances. Religious affiliation, like ethnicity, frequently did not correspond to the borders of states. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 ended the fighting between German Protestant and Catholic princes. It stated that the religion of each state would henceforth be that of its ruler. Hundreds of thousands of families left home and crossed frontiers in order to relocate to a state where the prince was of their religious denomination.

The German states entered a period of relative religious peace, but in France in 1572, the Huguenots (the popular name for the French Protestants) rebelled against Catholic domination, setting off a civil war. Moreover, after years of mounting religious and political tension, Dutch Protestants led the revolt against Spanish Catholic authority in 1572, beginning a bitter struggle that lasted until the middle of the next century.

Then in 1618, religious wars broke out again in the German states with unparalleled intensity. The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) devastated Central Europe, bringing into the conflict, in one way or another, almost all of the powers of Europe. Armies reached unprecedented size, and fought with a cruelty that may also have been unprecedented.

The wars of religion in France and the Thirty Years' War began because of religious antagonisms, but the dynastic ambitions of French princes lay

years' War, the dynastic rivalry between the Bourbons of France and the Habsburgs of Austria—both Catholic dynasties—came to the fore, eventually dominating religious considerations.

The wars of religion resulted in the strengthening of the monarchies of France, Austria, and the smaller German states as well. Kings and princes further extended their administrative, judicial, and fiscal reach over their subjects in the interest of maintaining control over their populations and waging war. In France, a stronger monarchy emerged out of the trauma of religious struggles and competing claimants to the throne. Germany, in contrast, remained divided into several strong states and many smaller ones. Competing religious allegiances reinforced German particularism, that is, the multiplicity of independent German states.

THE WARS OF RELIGION IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

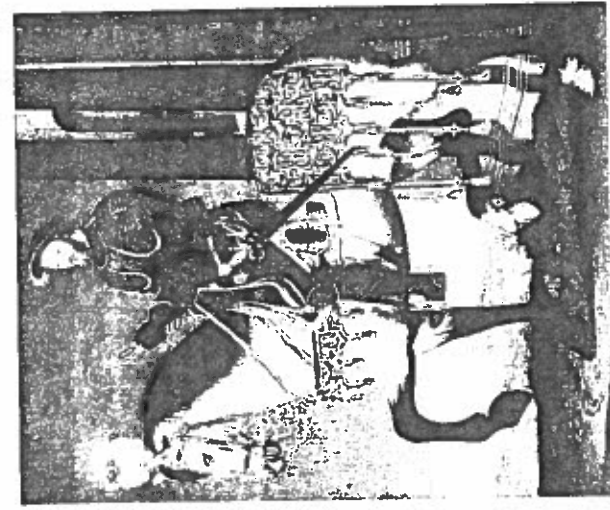
Early in the sixteenth century, France was divided by law, customs, languages, and traditions. Under King Francis I (ruled 1515–1547), the Valois monarchy effectively extended its authority. Of Francis I, it was said, "If the king endures bodily fatigues unflinchingly, he finds mental preoccupations more difficult to bear." Yet, the French monarch ruled with an authority unequaled in Europe, however much he was still dependent on the good will of nobles. When the king sought loans to continue a war, a Parisian noble assured him that "we do not wish to dispute or minimize your power; that would be a sacrilege, and we know very well that you are above the law."

When the Reformation reached France in the 1540s and 1550s, Calvinism won many converts (see Chapter 3). At a time when nobles were resisting the expansion of the king's judicial prerogatives and the proliferation of his officials, religious division precipitated a crisis of the French state and brought civil war.

A Strengthened Monarchy

Francis I and his successors became more insistent on their authority to assess taxes on the towns of the kingdom, many of which had held privileged exemptions granted in exchange for loyalty. Raising an army or royal revenue depended on the willingness of the most powerful nobles to answer the king's call. The monarchs had justified such requests with an appeal to the common good in tactful language that also held out the possibility of the use of force. Now the French king wished to tax the towns even when there was no war.

Francis reduced the authority of the Catholic Church in France. The Concordat of Bologna (1516), signed between Francis and Pope Leo X, despite



King Francis I of France, looking very regal and proud of his increased authority, despite not being painted wearing his crown.

the resistance of the French clergy, established royal control over ecclesiastical appointments. Many more royal officials now represented and enforced the royal will in the provinces than ever before. One sign of the growing power of the monarchy was that nobles lost some privileges of local jurisdiction to the royal law courts. Francis confirmed and enhanced Paris's identity as the seat and emerging symbol of royal power. The sale of offices originated in the king's desire for the allegiance of nobles and for the revenue they could provide the monarchy. His successors would depend increasingly on the sale of offices and titles for raising revenue. Finding nobles unwilling to provide all the funds the king desired, the monarchy, in turn, put the squeeze on peasants, extracting more resources through taxation.

The political and religious crises in the middle decades of the sixteenth century threatened monarchical stability in France. They pushed the country into a period of chaos brought by the lengthy, savage war of religion during which the four Valois kings who succeeded Francis I proved unable to rule effectively.

Economic Crisis

The end of a period of economic expansion provided a backdrop for the political and religious struggles of the French monarchy. The population of France had risen rapidly between the late fifteenth century and about 1570, reversing the decline in population resulting from plagues and natural disasters in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Land under cultivation increased, particularly near the Mediterranean, where landowners planted olive trees on hills and terraces. But by 1570, the increase in cultivable land slowed down in much of France. The European population, which had risen to about 100 million people during the sixteenth century, outstripped available resources. Prices rose rapidly in France, as in most of Europe, pushed upward relentlessly by population increase. Beginning in the late 1550s, the

purchasing power of the laborer declined dramatically, whereas that of landowners remained stable, fed by high prices. As agricultural income fell, nobles demanded vexing services from peasants, such as repairing roads and paths on their estates. Many wealthy nobles rented out land to tenant farmers, then took the proceeds back to their luxurious urban residences. Nobles of lesser means, however, did not do as well as the owners of great estates, because the rents they drew from their land failed to keep pace with rising prices.

As the price of profitable land soared, peasant families tried to protect their children by subdividing land among male offspring. Many peasants with small parcels of land became sharecroppers at highly disadvantageous terms—working someone else's land for a return of roughly half of what was produced. Both trends worked against increased agricultural efficiency, reducing land yields. Landless laborers were barely able to sustain themselves.

Taxes and tithes (payments owed the Catholic Church—in principle, 10 percent of income) weighed heavily on the poor. Peasants, particularly in the southwest, sporadically revolted against taxes, and against their landlords, during the period from 1560 to 1660. The popular nicknames of some of the groups of rebels reflect their abject poverty and desperation: the “poor wretches,” who rose up against the nobles in central and southern France in 1594–1595, and the “bare feet.” Many of the rebels espoused the popular belief that their violence might restore an imagined world of social justice in which wise rulers looked after the needs of their people.

French Calvinists and the Crisis of the French State

Followers of John Calvin arriving in France from nearby Geneva attracted converts in the 1540s and 1550s. Henry II (ruled 1547–1559), who succeeded his father Francis I, began a religious repression that created Calvinist martyrs, perhaps further encouraging Protestant dissent. The spread of Calvinism led the king to sign the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559, ending the protracted struggle between France and Spain. After decades of reckless invasions, Henry II agreed to respect Habsburg primacy in Italy and control over Flanders. King Philip II (ruled 1556–1598) of Spain, in return, promised that Spain would desist in its attempts to weaken the Valois kings. These two most powerful kings in Europe ended their struggle for supremacy not only because their resources were nearly exhausted, but also because as Catholic rulers they viewed with alarm the spread of Calvinism in Western Europe, both within the Netherlands (a rich territory of the Spanish Habsburgs) and within France itself. After signing the treaty, Henry II and Philip II could now turn their attention to combating Protestantism.

Some nobles in France, wary of the extending reach of the Valois monarchy and tired of providing funds for wars, resisted the monarchy. The conflict between the monarchy and the nobility compounded growing religious

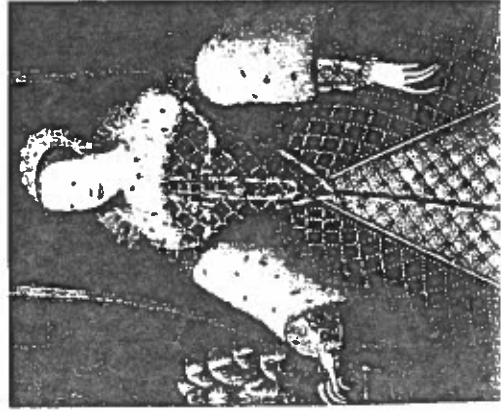
division in the last half of the sixteenth century. Perhaps as many as 40 percent of French nobles converted to Calvinism, some of them nobles of relatively modest means squeezed by economic setbacks.

In 1559, King Henry II was accidentally killed by an errant lance during a jousting tournament celebrating peace with Spain. He was succeeded by his fifteen-year-old son, who became Francis II (ruled 1559–1560). Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589), Henry II's talented, manipulative, and domineering widow, served as regent to the first of her three sickly and incapable sons. Catherine was reviled as a "shopkeeper's daughter," as her Florentine ancestors had been merchants, bankers, and money changers, all things incompatible with the French concept of nobility (but not with the Italian one). That she was the daughter of the man to whom Machiavelli had dedicated *The Prince* added to the "legend of the wicked Italian queen" in France.

The throne immediately faced challenges to its authority by three powerful noble families, each dominating large parts of France. Religious differences sharpened the rivalry between them. The Catholic Guise family, the strongest, concentrated its influence in northern and eastern France. In the south, the Catholic Montmorency family, one of the oldest and wealthiest in the kingdom, held through marriage alliances the allegiance of some of the population there. The influence of the Huguenot Bourbon family extended into central France and also reached the far southwestern corner.

In 1560, Louis, prince of Condé (1530–1569), a member of the Huguenot Bourbon family, conspired to kidnap Francis II and remove him from the clutches of the House of Guise, who were related to Francis's wife, Mary Stuart, queen of Scotland. The Guise clan, who discovered the plot, killed some of the Bourbon conspirators. Francis died after a stormy reign of only eighteen months, succeeded by his ten-year-old brother Charles IX (ruled 1560–1574), under the regency of their mother.

The rivalry between the Guise, Montmorency, and Bourbon families undermined royal authority. Henry II's lengthy war with Spain had drained the royal coffers, and the economic downturn made it extremely difficult to fill them again. Catherine's efforts to bring some of the nobles who had converted to Protestantism to the royal court and to bring about a rapprochement



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between the two denominations failed utterly. Such attempts only infuriated the House of Guise, several of whose members held important positions within the Catholic Church hierarchy. For their part, Philip II of Spain and the Jesuit religious order backed the Guise family. The political crisis of France, then, became increasingly tied to the struggle of the Church with Protestants.

Taking advantage of the confusion surrounding the throne, French Calvinists became bolder in practicing their religion. Religious festivals occasioned brawls between Catholics and Huguenots. Calvinists seized control of Lyon in 1562, forcing the rest of the population to attend their services. Where they were a majority, Calvinists desecrated Catholic cemeteries, smashed ornate stained-glass windows, shattered altar rails of churches, and covered statues of saints with mud. Catholics replied by slaughtering Calvinists, more than once forcing them to wear crowns of thorns, like Christ, to their death. Both sides burned the "heretical" books of the other denomination. The violence of a holy war was accentuated by rumors that the Huguenots indulged in orgies, while Protestants accused Catholics of idolatry and of doing the devil's work.

Yet in France—as in other parts of Europe where the Reformation had taken hold—some brave souls urged religion toleration. For example, an abbot warned in 1561:

I am well aware of the fact that many think it wrong to tolerate two religions in one kingdom, and in truth it could be wished that there were only one, provided it were the true religion. . . . there is indeed no sense in wanting to use force in matters of conscience and religion, because conscience is like the palm of the hand, the more it is pressed, the more it resists, and lets itself be ordered only by reason and good advice.

In 1562, the first full-scale religious war broke out in France. It began when Francis, the duke of Guise (1519–1563), ordered the execution of Huguenots who had been found worshipping on his land. In the southwestern town of Toulouse, more than 3,000 people were killed in the fighting; the bodies of Protestants were tossed into the river, and their neighborhoods were burned as part of a "purification." Members of the Catholic lay confraternities took oaths to protect France against "heresy" and erected crosses in public places as a sign of religious commitment. Catholics won back control of several major cities.

This first stage of the war, during which a Huguenot assassinated Francis, the duke of Guise, ended in 1563. A royal edict granted Huguenots the right to worship in one designated town in each region, as well as in places where Calvinist congregations had already been established. Intensifying the eagerness of the powerful quarreling noble families to impose their will on the monarchy was the fact that Francis had died childless and

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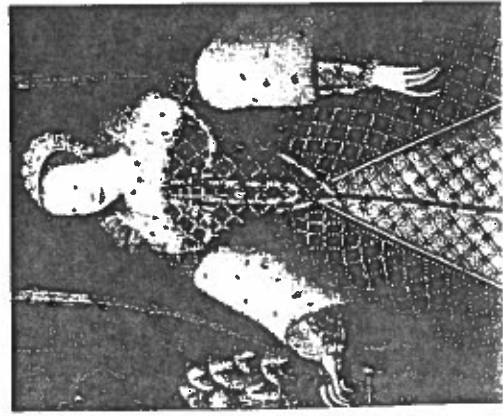
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young King Charles IX and his younger brother had no sons. There was no clear heir to the throne of France.

In 1567, war between French Protestants and Catholics broke out again. It dragged on to an inconclusive halt three years later in a peace settlement that pleased neither side. In 1572, Charles and Catherine, though Catholics, at first agreed to provide military support to the Dutch Protestants, who had rebelled against Spanish authority. The goal was to help weaken France's principal rival. But pressured by his mother and fearful of upsetting the more radical Catholics, as well as the pope, Charles soon renounced assistance to the Dutch and agreed to accept instead the guidance of the Catholic House of Guise. With or without the king's knowledge or connivance, the Guise family tried but failed to assassinate the Protestant leader Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572), a Montmorency who had converted to Protestantism and whom they blamed for the earlier murder of the Catholic Francis, duke of Guise.

The marriage between Charles's sister, Margaret, a Catholic Valois, and Henry of Navarre, a Bourbon Huguenot, was to be, in principle, one of religious reconciliation. The negotiations for the wedding had specified that the Huguenots in Paris come to the wedding unarmed. But the king's Guise advisers, and perhaps his mother as well, convinced him that the only way of preventing a Protestant uprising against the throne was to strike brutally against the Huguenots. Therefore, early in the morning on August 24, 1572, Catholic assassins hunted down and murdered Huguenot leaders. During what became known as the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the (new) duke of Guise killed Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, whose battered corpse was thrown through a window, castrated, and then dragged through the dusty streets of Paris by children. For six days Catholic mobs stormed through the streets, killing more than 2,000 Protestants. Outside of Paris, another 10,000 Protestants perished. The Parlement of Toulouse, one of the twelve judicial courts of medieval origin that combined judicial and administrative functions, made it legal to kill any "heretic." The pope had a special Mass sung in celebration of the slaughter. Thousands of Huguenots emigrated or moved to safer places, including fortified towns they still held in the southwest.

Charles IX died in 1574 and was succeeded by his ailing brother, Henry III (ruled 1574–1589). At his coronation, the crown twice slipped from Henry's head, a bad omen in a superstitious age. The new king was a picture of contradictions. He seemed pious, undertook religious pilgrimages, and hoped to bring about a revival of faith in his kingdom. He also spent money with abandon and enjoyed dressing up as a woman, while lavishing every attention on the handsome young men he gathered around him.

Henry III also had to confront a worsening fiscal crisis compounded by a series of meager harvests. But when he asked the provincial Estates (regional assemblies dominated by nobles) for more taxes, the king found that his promises of financial reform and of an end to fiscal abuses by royal revenue



The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 1572, in which more than 2,000 Huguenots perished in Paris.

agents were not enough to bring forth more revenue. The Estates deeply resented the influence of Italian financiers at court, the luxurious life of the court itself, and the nobles who had bought royal favor.

The Catholic forces around the king were not themselves united. A group of moderate Catholics, known as the *politiques*, pushed for conciliation. Tired of anarchy and bloodshed, they were ready to put politics ahead of religion. The *politiques* therefore sought to win the support of the moderate Huguenots, and thereby to bring religious toleration and peace to France.

In 1576, Henry III signed an agreement that liberalized the conditions under which Protestants could practice their religion. Concessions, however, only further infuriated the intransigent Catholics, who became known as the "fanatics" (*dévots*). Angered by these concessions to Huguenots, a nobleman in the northern province of Picardy organized a Catholic League, which because of its size posed a threat not only to Huguenots but also to the monarchy. It was led by the dashing Henry, duke of Guise (1550–1588), who was subsidized by Philip II of Spain, and vowed to fight until Protestantism was completely driven from France. But another military campaign against Protestants led to nothing more than a restatement of the conditions under which they could worship.

Henry III's reconciliation with the House of Guise did not last long. The death of the last of the king's brothers, Francis, duke of Anjou, in 1584 made Henry of Navarre, a Protestant, heir to the throne. This was the Catholics' worst nightmare. The Catholic League threw its full support

behind the aged, ambitious Catholic Cardinal de Bourbon, who was next in line after Henry of Navarre.

Henry of Navarre

Henry of Navarre (1553–1610) was born in the town of Pau on the edge of the Pyrenees Mountains in southwestern France. The son of Antoine of Bourbon, patriarch of the powerful Bourbon family, and Jeanne d'Albret, Henry inherited the keen intelligence of his mother and his father's independence. His mother was a committed Huguenot and raised Henry in that faith. When his father, who was notoriously unfaithful to his wife, sent her back to the southwest in 1562, Henry converted to Catholicism, his father's religion. After his father's death in battle, Henry reembraced Protestantism. Taken to the royal court as a hostage by Catherine de' Medici, he was permitted to have Huguenot tutors. Among his friends at court were the future Henry III and Henry, duke of Guise. It was after Henry of Navarre's wedding in Paris in August 1572 to Margaret, Catherine de' Medici's daughter, that the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre occurred. Henry then was given the choice of embracing Catholicism or being executed. He chose the former. When the fighting temporarily ended, Henry had more time for his favorite pursuits—pursuing women and hunting.

The Huguenots had every reason to be wary of a young man who seemed to change faiths with such ease. Furthermore, he seemed to have reconciled himself to the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, still counted the duke of Guise among his friends, had accompanied the Catholic army, albeit under guard, and had written the pope begging forgiveness for past misdeeds.

But having left Paris and the watchful eye of the Catholic dukes, Henry then formally abjured Catholicism and took up residence as royal governor in the southwest, where Protestantism was strong. There he tried to steer a path between militant Catholics and Huguenots. His endorsement of mutual religious toleration won wide approval. After Henry of Navarre became heir to the throne in 1584, the Catholic League rallied its forces, drawing its muscle from the artisans of Paris and other northern towns. In defiance of the king, it forced the Parlement of Paris to withdraw the toleration afforded the Huguenots. The Catholic League's goal was to put the Cardinal de Bourbon on the throne, although the duke of Guise wanted it for himself.

The struggle between the "three Henrys" now began in earnest. Henry (Valois) III first allied with Henry (Bourbon) of Navarre and with the duke of Montmorency against Henry, duke of Guise. The Guise family provocatively accused the king in 1585 of destroying the kingdom through inept rule and called for a rebellion that would bring the duke of Guise to the throne and drive Protestantism from the kingdom.

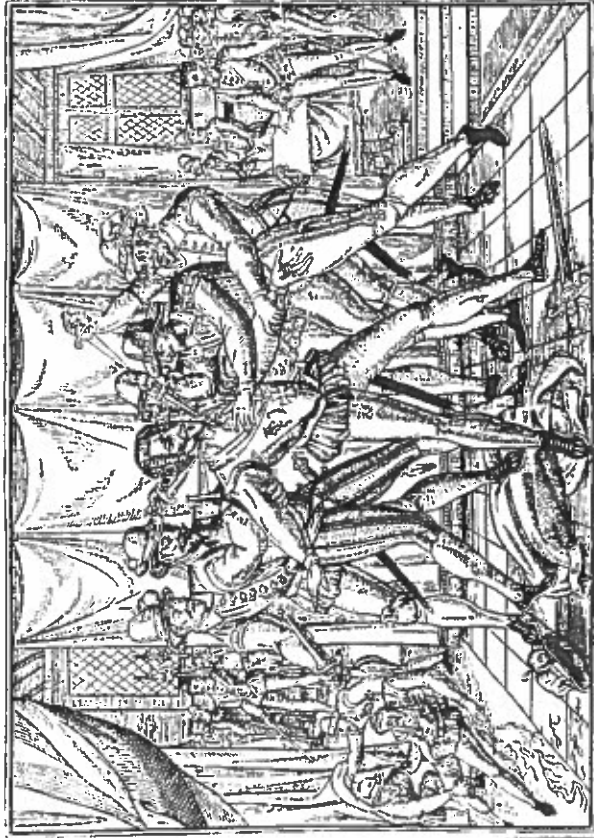
Henry III then switched partners, joining the duke of Guise against Henry of Navarre. The Treaty of Nemours (1585) between Catherine de' Medici and Henry, duke of Guise, abrogated all edicts of religious toleration and turned over a number of towns to the Catholic League. Now the odd man out, Henry of Navarre prepared for a new war. He denounced Spanish meddling and in a quintessentially *politique* statement, called on soldiers "to rally around me . . . all true Frenchmen without regard to religion." Although he increasingly depended on German and Swiss mercenaries for his army and benefited from the intervention of a German Protestant force, Henry's denunciation of foreign influence was a shrewd piece of political propaganda aimed at moderate Catholics—the *politiques*—and the Catholic clergy.

In 1587, Henry of Navarre defeated the combined forces of the king and the Catholic League at Coutras, near Bordeaux. Here his defensive positioning and use of artillery and cavalry proved decisive. But instead of following up his surprising victory by pursuing the Catholic army, Henry went back to hunting and making love. As a contemporary put it, "All the advantage of so famous a victory floated away like smoke in the wind."

That year, 1587, Queen Elizabeth I of England put to death Mary Stuart, the Catholic queen of Scots and the niece of the duke of Guise (see Chapter 5). Angered by Henry III's inability to prevent the execution of his niece, Guise, at the urging of the king of Spain, marched the next year to Paris, where he and the Catholic League enjoyed support. The Spanish king hoped to keep the French king from contemplating any possible assistance to England as the Spanish Armada sailed toward the English Channel. When Henry III sent troops to Paris to oppose the duke of Guise, the Parisian population rose in rebellion on May 12, 1588, stretching barricades throughout the city center. The king ordered his troops to withdraw. The "Day of Barricades" marked the victory of a council led by clergymen known as the Sixteen, then the number of neighborhoods in Paris.

For several years, the Sixteen had been energetically supporting the League, while denouncing the king, the Catholic *politiques*, and Huguenots with equal fervor. The hostility of the population of Paris convinced the king to accept Cardinal de Bourbon (1523–1590) as his heir, the duke of Guise as his lieutenant-general, and to convoke the Estates-General (representatives of the provincial Estates, which the monarch could summon in times of great crisis).

Then in 1588, the delegates to the Estates-General, many of them members of the Catholic League, gathered in the Loire Valley town of Blois. Scathing written grievances were submitted to the delegation, including one from Paris that denounced the king as a "cancer . . . filled with filth and infectious putrefaction" and called for "all heretics, whatever their quality, condition or estate, [to] be imprisoned and punished by being burned alive." By now, however, the English fleet had defeated Philip II's Armada in the Channel (see Chapter 5), and the nobles found Henry III



Assassination of Henry, duke of Guise.

less intimidated than they had anticipated. When the duke of Guise heard a rumor that the king was planning his assassination, he replied, "He does not dare." But Henry III's bodyguards murdered Henry, duke of Guise, shortly before Christmas 1588 in the Château of Blois, as Catherine de' Medici lay dying in a room beneath the bloody struggle. The Valois king had the Cardinal de Bourbon and other prominent members of the Catholic League arrested.

The duke of Guise's assassination drove the Catholic League to full-fledged revolt against Henry III. More than 300 towns, most of them in the north, now joined the "Holy Union" against the king. As Catholics prepared to fight Catholics, Henry of Navarre (again Protestant) appealed for peace: "We have been mad, senseless and furious for four years. Is that not enough?"

Henry III was then forced to make an alliance of convenience with Henry of Navarre against the Catholic League. As their combined armies besieged Paris, a monk assassinated Henry III in August 1589. The king's Swiss guards, who had not done a terribly good job protecting their king, threw themselves at the feet of Henry of Navarre, telling him, "Sire, you are now our king and master."

The Catholic League, however, had proclaimed five years earlier that Cardinal de Bourbon would become king upon Henry III's death. Henry imprisoned his potential rival. Henry of Navarre's forces defeated Catholic League armies twice in Normandy, in 1589 and in 1590. But once again

Henry failed to take advantage of the situation his shrewd generalship had made possible. He dawdled before finally laying siege to starving Paris.

The arrival of a Spanish army from Flanders to provision Paris helped win Henry further support from moderate Catholics, who resented Spanish intervention that might prolong the siege. Fatigue began to overcome religious conviction. Henry also played on resentment at the involvement of the pope in French affairs (Henry had been excommunicated in 1585 and, for good measure, a second time six years later). As Henry's army besieged Paris, Spanish troops defeated forces loyal to him in several provinces. The death of Cardinal de Bourbon in 1590 led Philip II to proclaim the candidacy of the late Henry II's Spanish granddaughter as heir to the throne of France, and then to suggest that he might claim it himself. In the meantime, Henry's continued successes on the battlefield and conciliatory proclamations furthered his popularity.

Henry of Navarre, a man of changing colors, had another major surprise up his sleeve. In 1593, he astonished friend and foe alike by announcing that he would now again renounce Protestantism. This move, however, reflected his shrewd sense of politics. Paris, as he put it, was worth a Mass, the price of the capital's obedience. Following his coronation as Henry IV at Chartres the following year, Paris surrendered after very little fighting. Henry's entry into his capital was a carefully orchestrated series of ceremonies that included the "cure" of hundreds of people afflicted with scrofula (a tuberculous condition) by the royal touch, a monarchical tradition in France and England that went back centuries. Henry nodded enthusiastically to the women who came to their windows to catch a glimpse of the first Bourbon king of France.

Catholic League forces gradually dispersed, one town after another pledging its loyalty to Henry, usually in return for payments. Henry's declaration of war on Spain in 1595 helped rally people to the monarchy. The pope lifted Henry's excommunication from the Church. Henry invaded Philip's territory of Burgundy, defeating his army. In 1598, the last Catholic League soldiers capitulated. Henry, having secured the frontiers of his kingdom, signed the Treaty of Vervins with Philip II to end the war that neither side could afford to continue. However, bringing stability to France would be no easy matter. The wars of religion had worsened the plight of the poor. Disastrous harvests and epidemics in the 1590s compounded the misery. The wars of the Catholic League caused great damage and dislocated the economy in many parts of France. The indiscriminate minting of coins by both sides worsened inflation.

Henry's emissaries gradually restored order by promising that "the Well-Loved," as the king became known, would end injustices and provide "a chicken in every pot." He did slightly reduce the direct tax, of which the peasants bore the brunt. Henry also rooted out some of the corruption in the farming of taxes, whereby government officials allowed ambitious middlemen to collect taxes in exchange for a share. But, in all, even more of the tax burden fell upon the poor.

Gradually Henry succeeded in putting the finances of the monarchy on a firmer footing. In 1596, he convinced an Assembly of Notables to approve a supplementary tax. A new imposition (the *paulette*) permitted officeholders, through an annual payment to the throne, to assure that their office would remain in the hands of their heirs. The *paulette* gave the wealthiest nobles of the realm a greater stake in the monarchy. But while increasing royal revenue, it intensified the phenomenon of the venality of office: the purchase of offices and the noble titles that went with them.

Henry could rarely rest at ease. In 1602 and again two years later, he uncovered plots against him by nobles in connivance with the Spanish monarchy. He survived nine assassination attempts. Indeed, Jesuit pamphleteers called for his assassination. Small wonder that he carried two loaded pistols in his belt and that some nervous soul tasted his food and drink before he did.

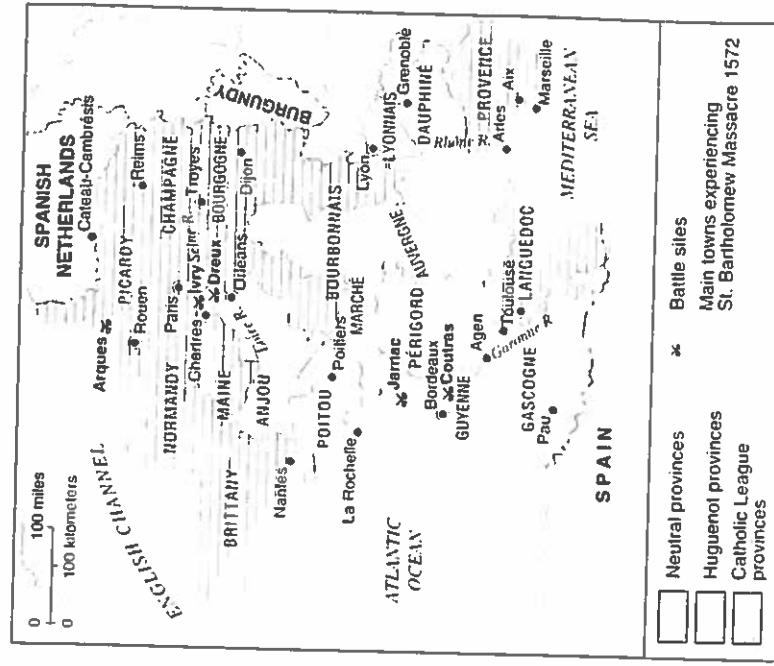
In 1598, Henry's Edict of Nantes made Catholicism the official religion of France. But it also granted the nation's 2 million Protestants (in a population of about 18.5 million) the right to worship at home, hold religious services and establish schools in specified towns—almost all in the southwest and west—and to maintain a number of fortified towns. The Edict of Nantes also established chambers in the provincial parlements, or law courts dominated by nobles, to judge the cases of Protestants (see Map 4.1).

But careful to placate powerful sources of Catholic opposition, a series of secret decrees also promised Paris, Toulouse, and other staunchly Catholic towns that Protestant worship would be forbidden within their walls. The Edict of Nantes thus left the Protestants as something of a separate estate with specified privileges and rights, but still on the margin of French life. "What I have done is for the sake of peace," Henry stated emphatically. Yet former Catholic Leaguers howled in protest. By registering royal edicts, the parlements gave them the status of law. In this case, they only gradually and grudgingly registered the edict, which provided the Huguenots with arguably more secure status than any other religious minority in Europe.

Henry's foreign policy, which appeared pro-Protestant, supporting the Dutch rebels against Spain and certain German states against the Catholic Habsburgs, was based on dynastic interests. This support of Protestant rebels and princes made it impossible for Henry to consider further concessions to the Huguenots.

At the same time, the Catholic Reformation bore fruit in France. The Church benefited from a revival in organizational zeal and popularity. Henry allowed the Jesuits to return to France in 1604, a sign that religious tensions were ebbing, and he admitted several Italian religious orders.

With various would-be assassins lurking, Henry had to think about an heir. He sought a papal annulment of his marriage to Margaret of Valois, whom he had not seen in eighteen years. While waiting, he prepared to marry one of his mistresses, but she died miscarrying their child. With the



MAP 4.1 WARS OF RELIGION IN FRANCE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY France at the time of the Edict of Nantes, 1598. The map indicates neutral provinces, Huguenot provinces, and Catholic League provinces during the wars of religion, as well as Huguenot and Catholic League towns and battle sites during the wars.

blessing of the Church, he then arranged to marry Marie de' Medici (1573–1642), a distant relative of Catherine de' Medici. This second marriage of convenience brought a sizable dowry that Henry used, in part, to pay off more international debts.

Intelligent and well organized, Henry kept abreast of events throughout his vast kingdom. But he had little sense of protocol, often rushing out of the Louvre palace by himself as his guards scurried to catch up. His wit was well known: when formally welcomed by a long-winded representative of the town of Amiens, who began "O most benign, greatest and most clement of kings," Henry interjected, "Add as well, the most tired of kings!" When a second spokesman began his official greeting, "Agessilaus, king of Sparta, Sire," Henry cut him short, "I too have heard of that Agessilaus, but he had eaten, and I have not."

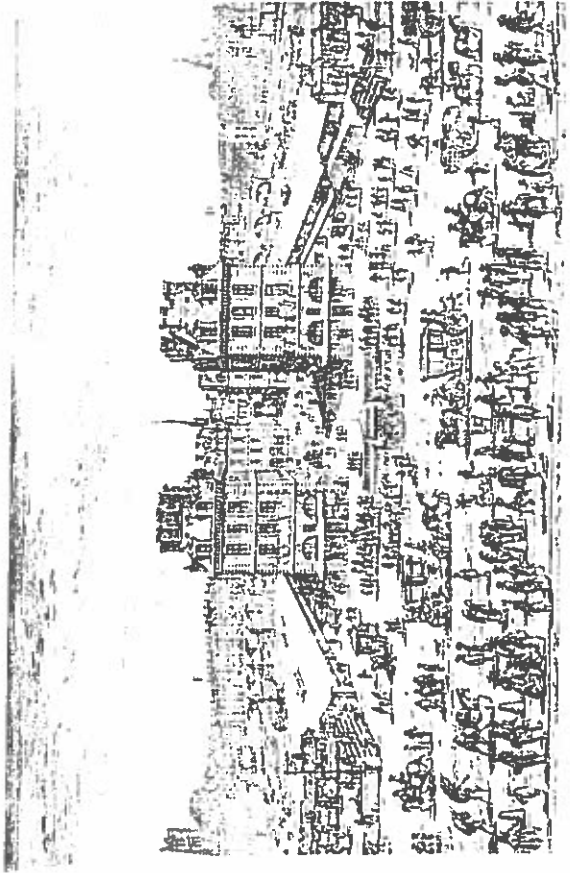
Henry had a charismatic and somewhat contradictory personality. In contrast to the portraits he encouraged depicting him as Hercules or Apollo, or arrayed in a splendid white plume and a warrior's helmet, the king of France was extremely slovenly, sometimes wearing torn or ragged clothes. He became renowned for his physical vigor on the battlefield and gambled large sums, with a notorious lack of success. Marie de' Medici bore the constant burden of her husband's various infidelities and occasional bouts of gonorrhea. Henry produced six illegitimate children by three mistresses, along with the three born to the queen. His nine offspring made up what he proudly referred to as his "herd."

Although he knew nothing of music or poetry, and regularly fell asleep at the theater, Henry IV nonetheless was a patron of new architectural projects that added to the beauty of the city of Paris and imprinted his rule upon it. He ordered the construction of four quays facilitating the docking of boats along the Seine River, and had built the splendid Place Dauphine, ringed by elegant buildings on the western end of the island of Cité, where his equestrian statue now stands. And he orchestrated the construction of the Place Royale, with pavilions of symmetrical arcades, brick construction, and steeply inclining roofs in the northern architectural style.

Statemaking

Restoring monarchical prestige and authority in France, Henry IV laid the foundations for what would become the strongest power in seventeenth-

The Place Dauphine, seen here from Pont-Neuf, was one of Henry IV's grand architectural projects.



century Europe. His reign was an exercise in early modern European statemaking as he reimposed royal authority throughout the realm. Henry was suspicious of any representative institutions, which he believed threatened the exercise of royal authority; he never convoked the Estates-General, and he ignored the provincial parlements.

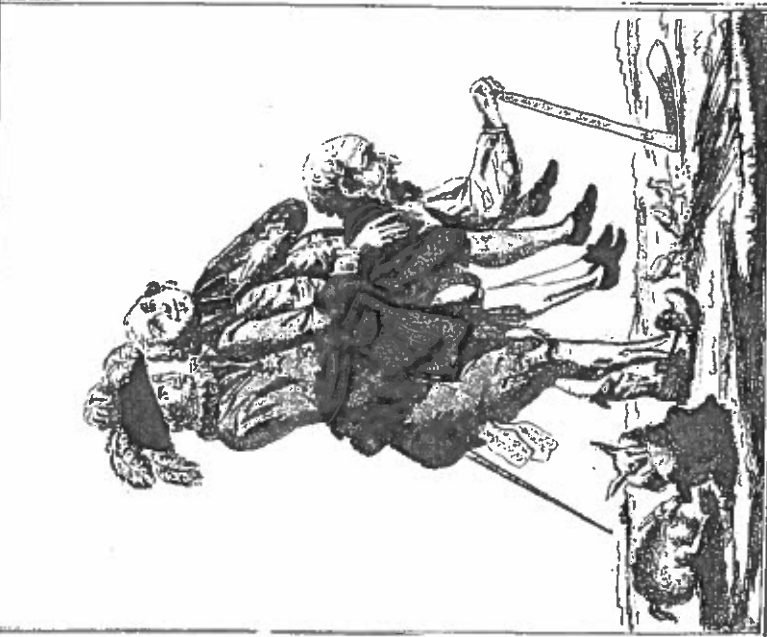
Henry IV made the monarchy more powerful by dispensing privilege, favors, and, above all, money with judiciousness that earned loyalty. The difficulties of extracting resources were complicated by the division of the provinces into more peripheral "state provinces" like Languedoc, Burgundy, and Provence, which had been recently added to the realm and retained some of their traditional privileges, and the "election provinces." In the former, the noble Estates assessed and collected taxation; in the latter, royal officials assumed these functions. Provincial governors represented the interests of the monarchy in the face of the privileges and resistance to taxes maintained by the provincial parlements and Estates. Conciliatory royal language began to disappear when it came to asking for money. The governors strengthened the monarchy at the expense of towns that prided themselves on their ancient privileges, further eroding their fiscal independence.

The royal privy council, some of whose members were chosen, like Sully, from the ranks of lesser nobles known for their competence and dedication, strengthened the effectiveness of state administration and foreign relations. The king personally oversaw this council, excluding troublesome nobles. Henry monitored the activities of his ambassadors and his court, whose 1,500 residents included the purveyors of perfume, of which he might have made greater use.

Much of Henry's success in achieving the political reconstruction of France can be credited to his arrogant minister of finance, Maximilien de Béthune, the baron and, as of 1604, the duke of Sully (1560–1641). Sully was the son of a prosperous Protestant family whose great wealth had earned ennoblement. He established budgets and systematic bookkeeping, which helped eliminate some needless expenses.

The monarchy gradually began to pay off some international debts, including those owed to the English crown, and the Swiss cantons, whose good will Henry needed to counter Spanish influence in the Alps. These repayments allowed Henry to contrast his honor in the realm of finances with that of the Spanish monarchy, whose periodic declarations of bankruptcy left creditors grasping at air.

Meanwhile, the nobles reaffirmed their own economic and social domination over their provinces. In 1609, Charles Loyseau, a lawyer, published a *Treatise on Orders and Plain Dignities* that portrayed French society as a hierarchy of orders, or three estates: the clergy, the nobility, and everyone else. He portrayed the king as the guarantor of this organic society. Henry restored the hierarchy of social orders based upon rank and privilege. But the boundaries between and within these estates were fairly fluid. A few



A FAUT ESPERER QUE SE JEU LA FINIRA BENTOT

At the time of the Estates-General in 1789, an image of an impoverished, elderly peasant carrying on his back a noble and a priest while scratching out a living from the soil.

newcomers ascended into the highest rank of dukes and peers who stood above even the "nobles of the sword," the oldest and most powerful nobles traditionally called on by the monarchy to provide military support. The "nobles of the robe," while not a coherent or self-conscious group, were men who claimed noble status on the basis of high administrative and judicial office, for example, in the parlements. Henry strengthened the social hierarchy by bolstering established institutions, including the parlements, the treasury, the universities, and, ultimately, the Catholic Church.

Henry also took an interest in encouraging French manufacturing, particularly silk and the production of tapestries. To promote internal trade, he encouraged investment in the construction of several canals linking navigable rivers. He was the first king to take an active interest in supporting a permanent French settlement in the New World, thereby increasing the prospects of French fishermen and trappers following Jacques Cartier's

exploration of the St. Lawrence River in 1534. Samuel de Champlain founded the colony of Quebec in 1608. Two years later, the first two French Jesuit missionaries arrived in what became known as New France.

On May 14, 1610, Henry's carriage became ensnared in traffic in central Paris. When some of his guards dashed forward to try to clear the way, a crazed monk named François Ravaillac jumped up to take revenge for the king's protection of Protestants. He stabbed the king three times, fatal

Louis XIII and the Origins of Absolute Rule

Henry's sudden death left Marie de' Medici, his widow, as regent for his young son, Louis XIII (ruled 1610–1643), who was eight years old at the time. Neither Philip III (ruled 1598–1621) of Spain nor James I of England, nor any of the princes of the German states, were in a position to intervene in France on behalf of either Huguenots or Catholics. Mar put aside Henry's planned campaign against the Huguenots and adopted a policy that considered Catholic powers to be friends.

Marie foiled several nobles' plots against her in 1614–1616. The conviction of the Estates-General in 1614 accentuated the eagerness of nobles to gain influence with the young king. One of them convinced Louis to impose his own rule. The king ordered the murder of one of his mother's confidants; Louis then exiled his unpopular mother, hoping to restore calm. When a group of nobles took this as occasion to raise the standard of revolt, the young king's army defeated them at Ponts-de-Cé near Angers in 1620. The royal army then defeated a revolt by Huguenot nobles in the southwest and west.

Emotionally, the stubborn and high-strung boy-king Louis XIII never really grew up. Throughout his life, he demonstrated the psychological burdens of having been regularly whipped as punishment on his father's orders. His father's murder when he was young also marked him. Louis XIII's marriage to an Austrian princess began with a wedding-night frisson that, whatever happened between the precocious young couple, led to a six-month period in which they did not even share a meal. Finally, things went better. After suffering several miscarriages, the queen produced an heir in 1638, but the royal couple was otherwise unhappy.

Louis XIII was intelligent and liked to sketch and listen to music, the latter calming him when he fell into a rage. He enjoyed hunting and winning at chess, once hurling the offending pieces at the head of a courtier who had the bad grace to checkmate him. Louis was a pious man who attended church every day. But he was also invariably willful, ruthless, and cruel, lashing out savagely at his enemies; indeed, no other ruler of France ordered as many executions as Louis XIII. Among those executed were a number of nobles convicted of dueling, a practice that the king detested because it represented to him the possibility that nobles could raise private armies against the throne.

During Louis XIII's reign, Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu (1585-1642) expanded the administrative authority and fiscal reach of the crown, dramatically increasing tax revenues. Richelieu's family, solidly entrenched in the west of France, had long served the monarchy in court, army, and church. The gaunt, clever Richelieu staked his future on and won the patronage of the queen mother. He perfected the art of political survival during the court struggles of the next few years. Richelieu was a realist. His foreign and domestic policies reflected his *politique* approach to both.

In 1629, Richelieu prepared a long memorandum for his king. "If the King wants to make himself the most powerful monarch and the most highly esteemed prince in the world," he advised that "[The Estates and the parlements] which oppose the welfare of the kingdom by their pretended sovereignty must be humbled and disciplined. Absolute obedience to the King must be enforced upon great and small alike." Richelieu divided France into thirty-two districts (*généralités*), organizing and extending the king's authority. Officials called *intendants* governed each district, overseen by the king's council and ultimately responsible to the king himself.

In order to enhance the authority of the monarchy and the Church, Richelieu turned his attention to the Huguenots. After forcing the surrender of insurgent Protestant forces at La Rochelle in 1628, he ordered the destruction of the Huguenot fortresses in the south and southwest, as well as the châteaux of other nobles whose loyalty he had reason to doubt.

During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648, see p. 145), Louis XIII, influenced by Richelieu, reversed his mother's pro-Spanish foreign policy, returning to the traditional French position of opposition to the Habsburgs. The dynastic rivalry between the two powers proved greater than the fact that both kings were Catholic. Louis XIII thus surprised and outraged the Spanish king by joining England and the Dutch Republic, both Protestant powers, against the powerful Catholic Austrian Habsburgs during the Thirty Years' War. And in 1635, France declared war against Spain itself.

Richelieu's successes, however, did not stand well with his resentful enemies within France. His toleration of Huguenot worship drew the wrath of some Catholic nobles, as did continuing costly wars against the Catholic Habsburgs, which led to French subsidies to Protestant Sweden. Revolts occurred in Dijon and Aix, both seats of provincial parlements, where local notables resented having to bow to the authority of royal officials.

One of the most conservative Catholic nobles, a royal minister, briefly turned the king against Richelieu. Marie de' Medici, returned from brief disgrace, tried to convince her son to dismiss the cagey cardinal. The "Day of Dupes" (November 10, 1630) followed, which amounted to little more than a high-stakes family shouting match between Marie de' Medici, Louis XIII, and Richelieu. Marie left thinking she had won the day, but awoke the next morning to find that the king had ordered her exile. The king's

own brother led a second plot against Richelieu from 1641 to 1642, backed by the king of Spain.

After decades of religious wars, the assassination of Henry IV, and a fragile, temperamental young monarch around whom plots swirled, the monarchy of France had nonetheless been greatly strengthened, building upon the accomplishments of his predecessor. Louis XIII's sometimes decisive and brutal action enhanced the reputation of the king who was known to many of his subjects as "The Just," whether fitting or not. A hypochoondriac whose health was even worse than he feared, Louis XIII died of tuberculosis in 1643 at the age of forty-two. But the man-child monarch had, with Richelieu, laid the foundations for absolute monarchical rule in France.



Philippe de Champagne's portrait of the sad-eyed Louis XIII.

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR (1618-1648)

In Central Europe, religious divisions and intolerance led to the Thirty Years' War, a brutal conflict during which the largely mercenary armies of Catholic and Protestant states laid waste to the German states. Dynastic rivalries were never far from the stage, bringing the continental Great Powers into the fray. When the war finally ended, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) established a territorial and religious settlement that lasted until the French Revolution.

Factionalism in the Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire was a loose confederation of approximately 1,000 German autonomous or semi-autonomous states. These states ranged in size from powerful Habsburg Austria to Hamburg, Lübeck, and other free cities in the north, and even smaller territories no more than a few square kilometers in size run by bishops. It would have been almost impossible for a traveler to determine where one state stopped and another began had it not been for the frequent toll stations, which provided revenue for each. The