

# **CHURCH HISTORY**

## **Protestantism in France, Netherlands, Hungary, Spain and Italy**

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### **The Modern Church, part 1**

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The Reformation could not stay static, and it began to affect all of Europe. Men were hungry for religious and political reform, and were willing to give their lives for this cause.
- B. It was primarily the teachings of John Calvin in Geneva that provided the backbone for the Protestant cause. His leadership put new life in the people to throw over the religious and political yoke of the Roman Church.

#### II. PROTESTANTS IN FRANCE

- A. The Beginning
  - 1. There was a general unrest among the people of France for economic, political and religious reform. The Roman Catholic clergy were probably more corrupt in France than any other nation of Europe.
  - 2. There was still in France the influence of the Waldenses, and there were some men like Jacques Lefevre, who were crying for reform within the church. In 1512, Lefevre wrote a commentary on Romans in which he denied that salvation could be gained by good works and asserted that man is justified by faith.
  - 3. Luther's works, originally written in Latin, were being translated into French, and his teachings were gaining a hearing in parts of France. (The language of the Reformation was Latin, and it was through this language that all the reformers of various countries could communicate.)

4. The Protestant movement found real success among the merchants and artisan classes in France. All classes, except the nobility, became readers of the Bible. While we have no exact figures, it is estimated that by 1534 Lutheranism had thirty thousand followers. Yet, the movement was not organized, and there was no unified leadership.

## B. The Influence of Calvin

1. Calvin was a Frenchman, and he had led the evangelical party in Paris before he was driven out. All the days of his ministry in Geneva he never forgot the Reformation in France.
2. In 1536 *The Institutes* were published, and this work provided the organizational basis for the French Reformation: a statement of doctrine; a form of public worship; and a system of church government. Calvin trained many Frenchman in his theological school in Geneva, and kept up a continuous correspondence with reformers inside of France. France was a mission field and missionaries were trained in Geneva to go into this field.
3. At first (for about 25 years), the Protestants met secretly in small groups. By 1560 it is estimated that one fourth of the population was sympathetic with the Protestant cause, and there were two thousand places of Protestant worship. Some of the finest leaders in France became part of the Protestant camp. In 1559, the Protestants held a synod in Paris and adopted the Gallic Confession. From this time on, the Protestants in France were called Huguenots. The Huguenots were the most solid, most modest, most virtuous, and most generally enlightened element in the French nation. The proverb "honest as a Huguenot" became a popular saying, denoting their high degree of integrity. The Huguenots were intellectually and morally above the average of the common people of any kingdom of Europe.

## C. St. Bartholomew's Day

1. *Political Background:* Protestants were socially but not physically persecuted under the reign of the Catholic King Henry II (1547-1559). When Henry died, he left behind him young sons who were dominated by his queen Catherine de' Medici and her uncles of the Guise family. This raised problems in France because the Guises were strongly Catholic and, coming from Lorraine, were looked on by many of the

French nobility as foreigners. The Houses of Bourbon and Chatillon were two leading opponents of the crown and the Guises, and their heads were also Protestants. This set up a great conflict between the Catholics who were in the majority, and the Protestants who were a minority group but growing like wildfire. There were eight wars fought between Catholics and Protestants, and the leader of the Protestant cause was Gaspard de Coligny of the House of Chatillon.

2. *The Huguenot Massacre*: In 1570 a brief peace was made. During this time and for political purposes, Admiral de Coligny acted as a prime minister to King Charles and his mother, Catherine de'Medici. A marriage was to be contracted between Henry of Bourbon, a Protestant, and Margaret, the sister of Charles. If this marriage came about, it was possible that Henry could take the throne. The Catholic extremists claimed the Protestants were trying to take the throne, and Catherine was able to convince the king of this. King Charles conceived a most wicked plot. He invited all the leading Protestants to the marriage of Henry and Margaret in Paris. In the early morning of August 24, 1572, St. Bartholomew's Day, bells were rung in the city of Paris as a signal for the massacre to begin. For three days and three nights the massacre continued. Admiral de Coligny was killed, but Henry of Bourbon managed to escape. The total number of those who lost their lives in the St. Bartholomew massacre has been variously estimated between 10,000 and 50,000. Schaff estimates it at 30,000. Many other Huguenots fled for their lives. It is estimated that over 100,000 of the finest citizens of France fled the country, and because of this France really never recovered economically, politically or religiously.

#### D. The Edict of Nantes (1598)

1. Henry of Navarre then became the leader of the Protestant movement in France. His military activities were successful, and ultimately, with the death of others in the royal line, he became heir to the throne of France. Since he did not have quite enough strength to complete his conquest, he turned Catholic and won the crown. His switch to Catholicism was obviously for political reasons, and perhaps to turn off the blood bath that was drenching France.
2. Though no longer a Protestant, Henry did not forget his former comrades. In 1598 he issued the Edict of Nantes, which granted the

Huguenots freedom of private worship, civil rights, and the right to public worship in 200 towns and 3000 castles.

3. After the Edict of Nantes, the Huguenots prospered. But in 1685 Louis XIV revoked the edict. Over four hundred thousand Protestants were driven into exile to the benefit of England, Holland, Russia and America. Had France treated the Huguenots rightly, or had the Protestants won control of the government, there probably never would have been a French Revolution, which Revolution turned the ruling of the nation over to infidels.

### III. PROTESTANTISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

- A. *The Beginning*: Those who set the stage for the Reformation were men such as John of Wessel, and groups such as the Brethren of the Common Life. Luther's teachings had a profound effect, but the Protestant cause was much more confused in the Netherlands than in France. The Lutherans, Zwinglians and Anabaptists were all struggling against one another.
- B. *The Influence of Calvin*: It was not until about 1550 that the people of the Netherlands began to feel the impact of Calvin's superior mind. But when Calvin's ideas became known, they achieved a swift victory. Many men were trained at the Geneva Academy. Gradually, the Protestants who followed Calvin's teachings came to be called "Reformed." The Dutch Reformed groups declared their faith in the Belgic Confession and the Netherlands Confession.
- C. The Persecution of Protestants
  1. Charles V, Emperor of Germany, was also king of Spain and lord of the Netherlands. Both in his reign and in the first years of the reign of his son Philip II, king of Spain, more than 18,000 persons in the Netherlands fell victim to the Spanish Inquisition. In an attempt to force them to a confession of heresy, both men and women were horribly tortured. The men were then burned, the women were drowned or buried alive. The scaffold had its daily victims, but did not make a single convert. These were men who dared and suffered as much as men can dare and suffer in this world, and for the noblest cause that can inspire a man: Jesus Christ!

2. The tyranny and cruelty of King Philip II of Spain became unbearable. Spain was at that time the most powerful nation in Europe. Holland was a very small country. But at last in 1568 the people of the Netherlands, under the leadership of the Calvinist William the Silent, prince of Orange, rose in revolt against Spain. The Calvinists of Holland became the champions of Protestantism for all the world. The Dutch fought on in the face of tremendous odds, but in 1584 William the Silent fell victim to an assassin's bullet. During this memorable struggle of 80 years, more Protestants were put to death for their conscientious belief by the Spaniards than Christians suffered martyrdom under the Roman Emperors in the first three centuries. The number of Netherlanders who were burned, strangled, beheaded or buried alive is estimated as high as 100,000, and has never been put any lower than 50,000. NOTE: It should be noted that only the Calvinists were really fighting Protestants. They, by far, shed the most blood for the Protestant cause in all of Europe.
3. Queen Elizabeth of England was very friendly to the Protestant cause, and was opposed politically to Spain. She aided the Dutch in their fight against Spain, but never officially declared war on the Spanish king. With the help of the Dutch, the English navy defeated the Spanish Armada, an enormous fleet of ships. This was the good providence of God, for had the Spanish won Protestantism in England, in the Netherlands, and in the continent of Europe would have been dealt a fatal blow. The Dutch under Prince Maurice, son of William the Silent, continued the war until 1609 when Spain, in a Twelve Year's Truce, practically acknowledged the independence of the Northern Netherlands, the Dutch Republic. Their independence came in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia. At that point the Dutch Reformed Church was officially established in the Netherlands.

#### IV. PROTESTANTISM IN HUNGARY

- A. In Hungary, Calvinism became the prevalent form of Protestantism. In spite of the hostility of the emperor Charles V in the sixteenth century, and severe persecutions by the Hapsburgs in the seventeenth, the movement could not be destroyed.
- B. In 1781 they were granted toleration, and by the nineteenth century had grown into the second largest Presbyterian Church in the world.

## V. PROTESTANTISM IN SPAIN AND ITALY

- A. In spite of the Inquisition, Lutheran doctrines passed early into Spain and Italy, and were accepted by a wide circle of cultured men. There were no finer Protestants than those of Spain. The movement however, was completely stamped out by the Inquisition in 1559 and 1560.
- B. Much of the same happened in Italy, but there the Inquisition was less cruel, although used freely by Pope Paul IV.

## VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Up to the year 1618, Lutheranism in Germany was prospering under the Peace of Augsburg (1555). But this treaty was broken in 1618 and Germany was plunged into the Thirty Years War, in which the population was reduced from 15 million to 5 million. This war came to a close at the Peace of Westphalia (1648).
- B. The Reformation passed through a period of bloody martyrdom between the years 1520 and 1562. Following that, from 1562 to 1648 the Protestants had to wage war for their very existence. Martyrdom was suffered mainly by the Calvinist Protestants, and it was they who from 1562 to 1618 bore the brunt of the war against the Catholics. Then from 1618 to 1648 the Lutherans were also forced into the war. During these years, German, Danish and Swedish Lutherans, and Dutch Calvinists defended the Protestant cause.
- C. When the wars between Catholics and Protestants came to an end with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the geographical extent of the Roman and Protestant churches had become fairly well fixed. There have been no major changes since that time.