The dynamic of religious violence in the French civil wars (1562-1598)

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Violence is something with which we feel utterly familiar. We know what it is, even though we may not have experienced it at first hand. That is especially the case in the 'extreme violence' generated during the French religious conflicts of the reformation period. The desecration of religious objects was conjoined by dehumanising inter-personal physical aggression in incidents that we have no hesitation in delineating as 'violent'. But any historical enquiry of the subject must begin by emphasising that violence is a 'nomenthesis', i.e. a non-normative categorization – a cultural construct, independent of genetic, social or gendered determinants. Violence is a means by which one individual or group constructs a hostile identity of another in order to render them anti-social, alien and barbaric. Even the valencies of the word differ in the vernaculars that we use. In English, for example, 'violence' carries overwhelmingly the sense of physical aggression, of one person displaying violent behaviour towards another. In French, on the other hand, it has the additional nuance of someone exerting pressure on another in order to secure their compliance. For Montaigne, for example, an innovation within the established order could be a 'violence'; so too could the verbal upbraiding of a pupil by a schoolmaster.[1] He regarded violence as a counterpart to (physical) force and cruelty, the expression of ungoverned appetites and disordered human passions.[2] Because violence is a cultural construct, it therefore has to be understood in the context of the 'dynamic' of the events that generate it. In that dynamic, there are three groups of participants: witnesses, victims, and perpetrators.[3] It is, however, fundamental to the cultural construction of violence that the relationship between these groups and the violence adduced is asymmetric. That is to say, it is identified by some participants and refuted by others. Violence is the word used by victims and witnesses of an act of aggression, and not by its performers. The latter seek to exculpate themselves from the charge of violence, justifying their actions by a variety of strategies. These claims and counter-claims lie within the performance of the events themselves. It is the dynamic of violence which is the central issue to be explained and understood; and, in that explanation, the relationship between witnesses, victims and perpetrators plays a central role.

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[1] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey et V-L. Saulnier (re-edition in one volume of the original three volume edition 1924) (Paris 2004) 122 and 389.

[2] Montaigne, *Les Essais*, 165, 580, 616, 646, 857, 859 and 1007.

[3] I have benefited in the argument of this article at various points from reading David Riches ed., *The anthropology of violence* (Oxford 1986) especially the editor's introduction.

The recent historiography of religious violence in the French civil wars

Religious violence has come to be seen as the central distinctive cultural and social feature of the French 'wars of religion', the complex and politically convoluted period of French history traditionally defined by the unexpected death of Henri II in a royal tournament in June 1559 on the one hand, and by the pacification at Nantes in April 1598 on the other. That is partly the result of a remarkable article, published in 1973 by the American historian Natalie Zemon Davis.[4] Entitled 'The rites of violence. Religious riots in sixteenth-century France' it has done much to change the parameters with which we view the subject. Davis focused on the grim, bizarre, terrifying episodes of popular religious violence in the French wars of religion. The documentation had always been there, but it offended (and still offends) liberal sensibilities. Some of the descriptions of individual brutality and collective carnage are undeniably gruesome. And there are questions to be asked about what constitutes the appropriate degree of objectivity towards such evidence, just as there are about the descriptions which abound of more recent ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or terrorist outrage in the Middle East.[5]

Historians have a habit of ignoring the evidence that they cannot make sense of; and in the case of the violence of the French wars of religion, these episodes seemed senseless and sad. Natalie Zemon Davis offered, for the first time, an explanatory framework for them. She explained how the participants in these events used a pre-existent vocabulary of ritualised, popular violence, 'rites' which gave shape, form and explanatory power to what was happening. All violence is, in some sense or another, 'predetermined'. In these instances, the 'predetermination' was religion, viewed as a cultural vocabulary. The cultural vocabulary was, she argued, different as between the parties involved in incidents of religious violence. There was a difference between the 'ritual massacral space' afforded by the traditional religion on the one hand, and the relative paucity of objectives for ritual attack, destruction or derision afforded by the reformed religion on the other. She cites the *Histoire ecclésiastique* as asserting that 'those of the Reformed Religion made war only on images and altars, which do not bleed, while those of the Roman religion spilled blood with every kind of cruelty'.[6] As she put it, 'when all this is said, the iconoclastic Calvinist crowds still come out as the champions in the destruction of religious property' whilst 'in bloodshed, the Catholics are the champions'. In this respect, she was repeating a familiar Protestant justification for their attacks on religious images and cultic objects: 'images and altars do not bleed'.[7]

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[4] Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The rites of violence. Religious riots in sixteenth-century France', *Past and present* 59 (1973) 51-91; reprinted in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France* (Stanford 1975) 152-188.

[5] The issues of 'scientific neutrality' and 'critical distance' in relation to the phenomena of extreme violence and massacre is raised in an article, reflecting on a 1999 Paris colloquium on the subject by Jacques Sémelin, 'In consideration of massacres', *Journal of genocide research* 3-3 (2001) 377-389.

Natalie Zemon Davis' article highlighted a tautology: that the wars of religion were about religion.[8] They were not a cloak by which social groups dressed up their aspirations. They were not the vehicle for expressing social or economic grievances, even though both emerged in due course and as a result of the prolonged hostilities, and to an extent that we have almost certainly understated.[9] They were not merely the tragic outcome of the 'triple whammy' that afflicted the French monarchy at more or less the same time in 1559-1562: undeclared bankruptcy, royal minority, and aristocratic factionalism. Religion – not in the sense of a set of confessionally determined beliefs, but in the sense of the 'sacred' (as opposed to the 'profane') – lay at the centre of the conflict. Her explanatory framework had coherence because it rested upon the insights of social theorists, especially Emile Durkheim and cultural anthropologists, especially

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[6] Davis, *Society and culture*, 173.

[7] E.g. [Jean de Serres], *Histoire des choses memorables avenves en France, depuis l'an M.D.XLVII. iusques au commencement de l'an M.D.XCVII.* (n.p., n.p. 1599) 208.

[8] Highlighted by the review article by Mack P. Holt, 'Putting religion back into the wars of religion', *French historical studies* 18-2 (1993) 524-251.

[9] And emphasised in Henry Heller, *Iron and blood. Civil Wars in sixteenth-century France* (Montreal 1991).

Mary Douglas.[10] But it was a coherence which lacked much by way of a dynamic framework. It explained a phenomenon in terms of its cultural meaning, rather than in terms of a process. Chronology played little part in it.

In subsequent discussions, historians have readily agreed with Natalie Zemon Davis that religion provides a framework of explanation for the religious violence of the period. But they have disagreed about how that framework works. Natalie Zemon Davis' explanation was in terms of religion equalling 'cultural meaning'. Since culture is concerned in part with symbols and meanings, violence is explained by the 'religious meaning' of objects (buildings, texts, books, clothes, parts of the body, people…) and behaviour (ways of expressing approval and disapproval, laughing with and against, sacralising and desacralising…). The difficulty with an explanation dependant on religion as cultural meaning is that it conflates the question whether the violence is being *manifested* in religious terms, or whether it is being *caused* by religion.[11] It is a question of what kind of explanation we are being offered. And the question becomes still more delicate when one considers that what constitutes 'religion' was itself the subject of change in the sixteenth century. That introduces into the equation a dynamic which has been used by other historians to help to 'explain' the violence in the French context. One way in which historians have understood that change has been inspired by John Bossy's encapsulation of it. Catholics tended to see religion as a 'body of believers', a worshipping community, invested with meaning by historic place, by its structural role within a traditional world order.[12] Describing Paris on the eve of the wars of religion in terms of its 'fabric' of catholic processional rituals, Barbara Diefendorf describes the city as 'the body social, the body politic, and the body of Christ (…) so closely intertwined as to be inseparable'.[13] Explaining the significance of the famous 'Affair of the Placards' of 1534, Mack Holt emphasises the social implications of an attack on the sacramental character of the mass, an attack not simply on the cultural meaning of the mass but on its functioning, structural reality as a focus of communal reconciliation and social embodiment.[14] Protestants, by contrast, evolved into seeing religion as a 'body of beliefs', a 'credal community' that did not necessarily map onto any pre-existent social entity. The Protestant social entity laid claim to meaning and relevance to its adherents with reference to God's word and the activity of God's providence in the world. That body of beliefs created a different sense of community, disjoined from the past, a new Jerusalem with a stronger sense of social discipline – all components of a distinctive structural solidity. The violence of the French civil wars becomes a confrontation between two different ways of understanding belief. This explanatory pattern has the advantage of being a *dynamic* explanation, dependant on religion as *cultural structure* rather than *cultural meaning*.[15] A cultural structure is one in which coherent patterns of culture have causal social significance – as Max Weber argued almost a century ago – an underlying cultural 'logic' in which events parallel one another and play out in dramas at different times and places, but with similar plots, creating a cultural phenomenon that we are justified in regarding as an ideal type (in this instance: 'religious violence').

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[10] In particular, Emile Durkheim, *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris 1912); and Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger. An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (New York 1966). The influence of the latter upon her writing at this time is confirmed in Natalie Zemon Davis, *L'histoire tout feu tout flamme. Entretiens avec Denis Crouzet* (Paris 2004) 69-70.

[11] The point is made in the context of the violence of the French Revolution period by Claude Langlois, 'De la violence religieuse', *French historical studies* 21-1 (1998) 113-123.

[12] John Bossy, *Christianity and the West* (Oxford 1985) 170-171.

[13] Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the cross. Catholics and Huguenots in sixteenth-century Paris* (New York and Oxford 1991) 48.

The search for an underlying cultural 'logic' to religious violence in the French wars of religion led Denis Crouzet to the thesis underlying his remarkable two-volume work: *Les Guerriers de Dieu* (*The Warriors of God*), published in 1990.[16] In this work, Crouzet argued that religious violence must be viewed as the expression of a deep apocalyptic anxiety in French culture, a collective fear of the end of the world that had developed decades before the violence actually manifested itself.[17] He started by exploring the mental world of 'traditional' catholic France, locating the notion that the world would shortly come to an end in a structure of belief in which holy power was immanent, engaged mystically and prophetically in a struggle against the forces of darkness. Looking back to the period before the Protestant reformation – to around 1480 – he identified a renewed concern (to the point of collective obsession) with divine judgement and the Last Days. It was expressed in non-political and political modes and ran in self-sustaining cycles in which preachers and the new printing medium acted as critical points in the spiral. We may take a rough analogy to the process which he envisages in the heightened fear of crime in many contemporary western societies (despite the fact that the crime statistics suggest that the reality does not justify the apprehensions), fears which are fed and channelled by tabloid journalism and media sensationalism and lead to greater criminalization with, as a consequences, a greater level of crime. The analogy has to be adapted though, because people were conditioned to think of themselves as under, and responsible for, God's judgement. Judicial astrology, popularised in printed almanacs and prognostications, miracle pamphlets and prodigy literature, published sermons and speeches advertising the cosmic significance of the Turkish menace, the Black Arts of witchcraft and necromancy, the advent of syphilis in Europe provided exempla for which the only appropriate response was abject penitence (the contemporary antonym of 'extreme violence'). The coming of the new Protestant heresy was simply a summative fear, a fear embracing all fears. They were the false prophets of the Apocalypse, prophets whom God commanded must be destroyed in the end time. Through it, this 'conscience eschatalogique' was mobilised by a 'littérature panique', exemplified for Crouzet by the writings of the excitable Parisian preachers and publicists like Artus Désiré, François le Picart, and Pierre Dyvolé. The result was a violence that was unchained by an inescapable logic, an inextricable fear, a violence which liberated people from their fears in events, where they transgressed normal boundaries of social behaviour because they were behaving like puppets, God having sanctioned them to be his ministering angels.

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[14] Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629. New approaches to European history* (Cambridge 1995) 19-20.

[15] I draw the distinction from John R. Hall, 'Cultural meanings and cultural structures in historical explanation' *History and theory* 39-3 (2000) 331-347; and implicitly, too, from John R. Hall, Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse observed. Religious movements and violence in North America, Europe and Japan* (New York 2000).

[16] Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu. La violence au temps des troubles de religion vers 1525 - vers 1610*, 2 vols. (Paris 1990).

[17] For a summary in English of Couzet's arguments, see M. Greengrass, 'The psychology of religious violence', *French history* 5 (1991) 467-74.

This was one 'logic', one way of explaining the violence. But Crouzet's account has also to take into account the rise of Calvinist Protestantism in reformation France. He provides one which contains another impulsive logic, leading to another, distinctive form of violence. Calvin offered anxious believers a release from their fears by creating a new sense of a providential order. Calvin rejected judicial astrology, prognostication, divination and millenarianism. His belief system was fundamentally different. Holy power was not immanent in the world, fighting with the forces of darkness. World order came from the laws of nature, imposed by God the Curator, dictating a Providence which predestined its history and our salvation in ways that we could not hope to, and did not need to, comprehend. Calvinist theology provided a 'désangoissement' from the spiral of anxiety which affected France in the sixteenth century. Its violence was 'human', 'rationalistic' and 'cool'. It attacked images because Calvinists did not accept the semiotics of Catholic holy power. This iconoclasm spread towards other aspects of power too. Preachers were interrupted during sermons, clergy mocked in the streets, catholic processions held up to ridicule. The Roman church was portrayed as a world of 'fools', 'dogs, 'beasts', 'ravening wolves' etc. Parody, carnival, charivari were harnessed by Protestants to desacralise the traditional religion and liberate people from its ruses. The priests were the inevitable victims, and the gruesome rituals of their suffering took on the gestures and images appropriate to the mocking of their animal lusts before the people.

Crouzet's thesis is a *tour de force*; an attempt at an explanation of a phenomenon of religious violence which measures up to the phenomenon, and takes account of the internal dynamics behind it. His understanding of Protestant iconoclasm has been substantiated by the detailed investigations of Olivier Christin.[18] But how much has, in reality, been explained? If the underlying tensions that he identifies in the culture of France on the eve of the Reformation had the effects he ascribes, it is implausible that similar tensions did not exist elsewhere in Europe. And, indeed, they can all be readily documented from similar evidence elsewhere, including those places where the reformation had a very divisive impact. So the question becomes whether, within French culture, there was not some particular mechanism by which such tensions were highlighted. Perhaps, as Julian Woltjer has recently suggested, there were institutional social 'triggers' to violence in the French case that did not exist, for example, in the Netherlands.[19] There *were* social tensions in the violence of the French wars of religion, and they are not simply the consequences of the civil wars. They go back before the wars – to urban factionalism and the dispute over who paid *taille* in the case of Dauphiné for example, matters which were reflected eventually in the case of the Carnival at Romans that turned very nasty in 1580, to the suppression of the Vaudois and a nobility that came back from Italy determined to blame someone and change things in the case of Provence on the eve of the civil wars, to a deep-seated anti-seigneurialism in the south-west in the case of the famous and much-advertised assassination of the baron de Fumel in the south-west, again on the eve of the civil wars.[20] Woltjer may be correct to suggest that one of the key differences between the Dutch and French context for religious violence in this period lay in the greater adaptability of the Dutch urban environment, its magistrates with great authority to mediate conflicts before they grew out of hand. Equally, it is also possible that there was something distinctive about the 'dangerous vocation' of French catholic preachers and the popular reactions to what they said, wrote and printed.[21] A detailed study of the surviving sermons of one for whom the evidence is most plentiful – Pierre le Picart – suggests that his undoubted popularity came from his being banished from Paris for seditious preaching in 1534, for some scarcely-veiled and sensational attacks on those at the French court who were known to favour the new ideas, and for his commitment to the reform of the church, rather than his eschatological or millenarian views.[22] Perhaps, as Luc Racaut suggests in an important recent study, it was more the power of focusing traditional stereotypes of the alien 'other' in society upon the Protestants, a process that involved lay and clerical input alike, that was more important than the eschatological dimensions emphasised by Crouzet.[23] And, when it comes to the mobilising power of the printing press, we have to take into account the significant fact that the numbers of sermons being printed in France were in considerable decline in the years from 1530 to 1560, in comparison to the tens of thousands in the years before.[24] Only the analysis of the surviving imprints from French presses for the years from 1559-1600, currently being undertaken at the French Book Project under the direction of Andrew Pettegree, will begin to assist us in seeing whether the patterns of publication among the impressive production from catholic presses in those years give us any clues as to what was creating a spiral of violence in France that did not exist in, for example, the Netherlands in the 1560s.

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[18] Olivier Christin, *Une révolution symbolique. L'iconoclasme huguenot et la reconstruction catholique* (Paris 1991).

[19] Jan J. Woltjer, 'Violence during the wars of religion in France and the Netherlands. A comparison', *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis*, 76-1 (1996) 26-45.

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[20] See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans. De la chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres, 1579-1580* (Paris 1979); for Provence, see Jan J. Woltjer, 'Violence during the wars'; for the baron de Fumel, the recent thèse d'habilitation at the University of Paris-1 of Professor Serge Brunet (December 2003) provides important evidence to place the affair in the anti-seigneurial conflicts of the region.

[21] The term is taken from Larissa Taylor, 'Dangerous vocations. Preaching in France in the late Middle Ages and Reformation' in: Larissa Taylor ed., *Preachers and people in the reformations and early-modern period* (Brill 2001) 91-124.

[22] Larissa Juliet Taylor, *Heresy and orthodoxy in sixteenth-century Paris. François le Picart and the beginnings of the Catholic Reformation* (Brill 1999).

[23] Luc Racaut, *Hatred in print. Catholic propaganda and Protestant identity during the French wars of religion* (Aldershot 2002); cf. Luc Racaut, 'Religious polemic and Huguenot self-perception and identity, 1554-1619' in: Raymond A. Mentzer and Andrew Spicer eds., *Society and culture in the Huguenot world, 1559-1685* (Cambridge 2002) 29-43.

Witnesses, victims and perpetrators

To investigate the dynamic further, we must examine a sequence of events more closely. Let us take the week of religious violence that overwhelmed the small town of Senlis to the north of Paris in June 1562. What happened in Senlis generally did not hit the headlines. It was a walled town of under 10.000 inhabitants in the old Capetian heartlands that prided itself on its loyalty and consensual politics. And, by the standards of what happened in many French cities in 1562, what went on in Senlis was small beer: that is why it is worth studying. Our main witness is the *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées de France*, published in Geneva in 1580. Generally catalogued under the name of Théodore de Bèze, it was really a collaborative work, constructed from testimonies collected over twenty years from the French Protestant churches, and probably compiled by Simon Goulart.[25] Goulart had been born in Senlis in 1543. Although he moved away from the town and emigrated to Geneva in 1566, never to return, he always signed himself 'Simon Goulart, Senlisien' and kept in touch with events there through his brother Jean.[26] He was probably well-informed on events there.

It was on the evening of 21 June that the violence began. Civil hostilities had started on a national scale just over two months earlier. Senlis had a Protestant community in its walls. They had founded a church – albeit rather late in the day in 1559-1560. Tension between the catholic and

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[24] See Larissa Taylor, 'Out of print. The decline of Catholic printed sermons in France, 1530-1560' in: Robin Barnes et al, *Books have their own destinies. Essays in honor of Robert V. Schnucker* (Kirksville, Miss. 1998) 121-129.

[25] G. Baum and Ed. Cunitz eds., *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées du Royaume de France*, (facsimile reprint of Nieuwkoop, B. de Grauf, 1974 ed. 3 vols.) (Paris 1883-1889) vol. 2, 425-431 for events in Senlis.

[26] Leonard Chester Jones, *Simon Goulart. Sa vie et son oeuvre, 1543-1628* (Geneva and Paris 1917) 2-11.

Protestant communities had been evident in the preceding two months, especially as a result of the billeting of troops in the town. Its leading Protestants felt that they had been singled out unfairly in the quartering of the cavalry company. On midsummer's evening at about 10.00 pm, the town watch was patrolling the streets. During an altercation in a narrow alley, one of the volunteer guards, a merchant from a well-respected Senlis family (his brother was a canon of the cathedral) Pierre Du Mesnil was accidentally killed, possibly by another member of the watch, none too used to a pistol. His fellow guards, however, thought that the shot had come from a window onto the alley where a young cleric called Nicolas Gosset lodged in the house of his brother-in-law, François Suard. Enraged, they forced the door of the house, massacred Suard and his wife, and took Gosset prisoner. The following day, the whole town was up in arms on the rumour that the Protestants were somehow behind the affair and that 'they had taken up arms to kill everyone'. Protestant notables were rounded up, taken from their houses and imprisoned, some escaping as best they could. In the remainder of the *Histoire ecclésiastique* account, the emphasis is placed on the activities of the catholic aldermen governors of the town, Claude Stocq and Guillaume Bertaut [var.: Berthaud]. They manipulated a commission of two judges from the Parliament of Paris (Nicole Favier and Jean de Thérouanne), both with 'form' when it came to judging heretics.[27] The result were 25 show trials of noted Protestant prisoners by the Parliament (the *lieutenant particulier* of the royal court in Senlis, Jehan Greffin being one of the victims, alongside Antoine 'Trippier' [in reality, Antoine Crappier], a schoolmaster, and Jehan Goujon, originally a weaver, the Protestant preacher). The *Histoire ecclésiastique* account (followed in almost every detail by the later editions of Jean Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs*) makes a good deal of these Senlis 'martyrs', dwelling in particular on the death of the latter.[28] Judged at the Parliament in Paris on 21 November, he was transported back to Senlis where he was condemned to be hanged and burned. His constancy and knowledge of the Scriptures apparently impressed his judges in Paris; but back in Senlis, some of the crowd were sufficiently incensed by the leniency of the sentences meted out to the Protestants that they insisted the hangman cut poor Goujon down from the gibbet so that he burned in the flames below as a 'real' heretic should. Goujon duly played his role on the stage of martyrdom, rising above the flames up to three times to declare: 'Lord, have mercy on me'. Goulart, a great collector of evidence of God's 'providence' at work in the world, noted also with keen interest that the presiding judge at Goujon's trial (Gilles le Maistre) died that same night, petrified (so he said) at the prospect of the Protestants seizing Paris and having himself hanged instead.[29]

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[27] Both were lay judges with plenty of experience of the judicial repression of Protestantism in the 1550s, Favier having been nominated to the Parliament in 1550 and Thérouanne in 1555. See Edouard Maugis, *Histoire du Parlement de Paris de l'avènement des rois Valois à la mort d'Henri IV*, 2 vols. (Paris 1914) vol. 3, 201 and 206. Cf. William Monter, *Judging the French reformation. Heresy trials by sixteenth-century Parlements* (Cambridge 1999).

[28] Jean Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs persecvtez et mis a mort pour la verité de l'Euangile, depuis le temps des Apostres iusques à present* (Geneva 1608) fol. 581r-581v.

What can this account tell us about the dynamics of violence at Senlis? What does it leave out? It presents Senlis' religious violence as the result of a cynical exploitation of an incident which had nothing to do with the sectarian conflict at all (there being no proof that any of the individuals involved in the unfortunate death of Du Mesnil were Protestants) for personal gain and political ambition. It points the finger firmly in the direction of the 'insatiable avarice' of Stocq and Berthaud, out to exploit the tensions created by the civil wars for their own private gain. Had they not, says the *Histoire ecclésiastique* account, seized the city possessions of the Protestant-inclined grain merchant, Nicolas de Cornouailles, who took flight when the troubles started? Did they not have their eye on the wealth of the 'opulent' Pierre Henneguye and Constantin Bedeau, who were among the prisoners sent for questioning to Paris?[30] Had they not, adds the Crespin continuator, had at their beck and call an 'utterly profane man by the name of Pierre le Chien, the captain of a troop of brigands [in Senlis] known as the Band of the rue de Paris'?[31] The Protestants by contrast were the injured innocents, local civilians caught up in a maelstrom of events beyond their control, involuntary martyrs in God's cause.

Our difficulty is that, as so often, at this distance from the events, it is hard to penetrate this surface texture to discover the forces really at work in Senlis. What, to be precise, do we know about Stocq and Berthaud? Here, we have the benefit of an excellent recent doctoral thesis by Thierry Amalou who has examined all the surviving local evidence.[32] Like his father François, Claude Stocq was a grain merchant. He apparently handled the granary of one of the local abbeys. A good catholic, he founded a Mass in honour of his parents on 14 March 1555. He was elected aldermen (*échevin*) in 1560 and saw his mandate extended exceptionally because of the troubles in July 1562 (which is actually the date when Berthaud also became an alderman too), and then again in July 1563. Together they were energetic to the point of obsession in the discharge of their civic duties, extending their authority over and above that expected of them in a place which had little by way of a rooted and independent civic tradition. They certainly used the week of violence to arrest Protestant-inclined senior members of the local law-court (*bailliage*) and send them to Paris for trial. They sought to maximise the fiscal benefits to the town of the trials that were instigated in their wake. They were probably over-zealous, too, in raising the portion of the forced loan imposed on Senlis to pay for the urgent costs of the royal armies in the emerging civil war.

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[29] *Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, 242.

[30] Ibidem, 429 and 431.

[31] Crespin, *Histoire de matyrs.*

[32] Thierry Amalou. *Loyalisme monarchique et consensus urbain. Senlis devant les désordres religieux*, 2 vols., Thèse de doctorat d'histoire, Université de Paris-I (Panthéon-Sorbonne) 2003. This work will be published in due course.

But Stocq and Berthaud can also be seen in another light. Although the town's civic traditions were not strong, the elected *échevins* had undeniable responsibilities for the security and protection of the local community of Senlis. Such responsibilities were particular important in the circumstances of declared hostilities, a civil war, in which Protestant troops were mustering to the north of Paris, threatening the capital and its outlying protecting flank of towns, of which Senlis was one. As elsewhere in France, however, the legal magistrates of the local royal court, nominated officials of the *présidial* court, had, in recent generations, refused to serve as aldermen, regarding such an office as increasingly beneath them. Stocq and Berthaud doubtless regarded the local magistracy as 'lax' in their attitude to heresy. Prominent members of the court were leading Huguenots – Jehan Greffin, the *lieutenant particulier* and Antoine Parent, a *conseiller* in the *présidial* court were known to have preached and led prayers before the arrival of a minister in the town. Others – the *lieutenant-général* of the court, Philippe Loisel in particular – judiciously hedged their bets. And, after the edict of Romorantin in May 1560, the machinery for the local legal prosecution of heresy had been largely paralysed. The local aldermen therefore had to act to preserve the integrity of the town in their absence. They had additional encouragement from elsewhere. The town was close to the ancestral lands of the Montmorency family at nearby Chantilly and Ecouen. The duke of Montmorency had often intervened in the past in town elections to 'recommend' a particular candidate. In the delicate political climate of the quasi-minority of the young king François II (1559-1560) and then the real minority of his successor, Charles IX (1560-1574), Montmorency had an important role as Constable, titular head of the French army. He made no secret of his support for the traditional religion and encouraged his political allies and those in his affinity to act robustly in is defence too. His cavalry company had been despatched to Senlis on 12 April 1562. The *maréchal des logis* saw to it that the company was discriminatorily garrisoned on prominent Protestants in the city. The *gens d'ordonances* may not have been given explicit orders, but they knew the general steer. The *gens d'armes* maltreated their hosts and hostesses (one of the latter was so severely battered by a cavalryman's sword she later died of her wounds) and saw to it that the newly constructed Huguenot temple was completely ransacked. 'Brûle-Bancs' ('Bench-Burner') was how the no-nonsense militarism of the Constable became known to the Protestants. Without giving Stocq and Berthaud any explicit orders, the catholic aldermen of Senlis no doubt 'understood' their role in Senlis as 'outriders' for the Constable, carrying out his implicit instructions and protected by his authority.

Stocq and Berthaud had good reasons, too, to be concerned about the fate of Senlis. Not far away lay the town of Meaux, the *foyer* of French Protestantism from its earliest days. It was there, too, that the earliest signs of an organised community of heretics in France had emerged in 1546. The discovery had led to a gruesome auto-da-fé ('le bûcher des quatorze') and the development of a bitter, underground Protestant martyr culture. That community emerged from the shadows in around 1560 to become one of the centres of iconoclasm in northern France, culminating in a wave of destruction on 25 June 1562, when the cathedral church and abbey of Saint-Faron were ransacked and its clerical population set upon. The news of what was happening in Meaux arrived that same day in Senlis, acting in the same way as news and rumour from elsewhere in France did within the town, heightening the alarm and urgency among its local catholic defenders and contributing to the atmosphere behind the religious violence of those weeks.

One further element stands out from the Senlis case-study. The first is the absence of any catholic preacher in the town inciting the local populace to violence. If anything, the reverse was the case. The most notable clerical figure in Senlis was the Sorbonne-trained theologian (*théologal*) attached to the cathedral, Martin Martimbos. He had been a rector of the university of Paris and, like several of his distinguished predecessors, he was a controversial figure. To the author of the *Histoire ecclésiastique* account, he was a nicodemite, advocating an evangelical Christianity and lending out his copy of Calvin's *Institutes* to those who fancied reading it, but unwilling to commit himself openly to Protestantism 'like a candle that gave light to others but remained in the shadow itself'.[33] In the eyes of René le Roullier bishop of Senlis he risked scandal and worse. The bishop invited the Paris Faculty of Theology to investigate Martimbos' preaching and beliefs in 1555. After an investigation lasting two years (the surviving evidence of which documents richly the heterodox attitudes of Senlis' theologian and their reception locally) he was eventually censured publicly in 1557 and the affair rumbled on to 1559. Given the associated evidence of a gathering lay mistrust of its clergy in Senlis, it is not difficult to postulate that it was the vulnerability and divisions amongst its clergy, rather than their stridency, which lay behind the militancy of Stocq and Berthaud.

The potency of religious violence

How should we explain the potency of religious violence in the civil wars? We can do so in terms of cultural structure – examining the 'rites' of violence as evidence for the 'pollution' which was implicit in the appearance of a new belief structure in the midst of communities, challenging communal senses of identity and meaning. We can also do so in terms of cultural meaning – investigating the underlying cultural logic in religious confrontation and the emerging eschatological anxieties that resulted. But we should not forget the underlying 'potency' in all violence, whether religiously motivated or not. That potency arises from the political climate of violent interaction, in which one side inevitably perceives itself as the injured party and the other as the just pursuivant, each seeking to 'subvert' and 'pre-empt' the explanations for what happened offered by the other party. In these essential contested claims lies the potency of the religious violence of the period.

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[33] Cited Amalou, *Loyalisme monarchique*, 83; cf. Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève. Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris 1997) 75-77.