Religious Persecution in Eighteenth-Century France

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Introduction

Throughout the early modern period, Europe remained haunted by the religious tensions that had erupted from the Reformation. Despite the Peace of Augsburg (1555), the Edict of Nantes (1598) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which put an end to decades of religious wars, violence and persecution persisted well beyond. The Enlightenment and the spread of tolerationist ideas in the eighteenth century should not be regarded as the end of religious violence, but instead as a reminder that religious violence remained very much a reality in this period. Among the best-known examples of religious persecution in the eighteenth century are the Camisards, the Waldensians, the 'Poor Palatines', the Salzburgers, the Moravians, the Gordon and Priestley riots, to name just a few.[1]

In France, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 revived religious tensions in the Protestant provinces of Languedoc and Dauphiné after nearly a century of tolerance. Beside causing the exile of some 200,000 French Protestants towards northern Europe, the Revocation opened a century-long era of clandestinity and discrimination that would last until the French Revolution. Historians generally distinguish between three phases in this period, even though the intensity of the persecution varied between provinces. The years 1685-1715 were the most violent, marked by forced conversions, brutal persecution and the Camisards' revolt. The second phase, from 1715 to the early 1760s, corresponds to the organised revival of the French Protestant Church through clandestine assemblies and synods and the gradual decline of state persecution; and the third phase, from the early 1760s to the French Revolution, a return to a de facto religious tolerance.[2]

This paper surveys the plight of French Protestants from the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the French Revolution. It nuances the grand narrative of a steady path towards religious toleration by highlighting

[1] For a general overview, see B. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007).

[2] J. Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale de Louis XIV à la Révolution: de l'obscurité à la lumière* (Paris 2022), 104.

regional disparities and integrating foreign – mostly Dutch – sources. It argues overall that, despite the death of Louis XIV in 1715 and the role of the Calas affair in changing public opinion, anti-Calvinist sentiments and discriminations remained vivid in southern France until the French Revolution.

From the Edict of Nantes to its Revocation

The Edict of Nantes signed by Henry IV in 1598 after nearly four decades of religious wars marked the end of the legislative and religious unity of the country. Although Roman Catholicism was reasserted as the official religion of the state, for which Henry did convert upon accessing the throne, Calvinism became recognised for the first time, albeit only in circumscribed parts of the country. Protestants or 'Huguenots', as they were called, obtained freedom of worship in some 150 strongholds – *Places de sûreté* – and freedom of conscience elsewhere. Moreover, the edict made it possible in the practice for Huguenots to hold public office, study at university, serve in the military and bequeath property.

Despite this major achievement, religious tensions did not end in 1598. First, it took up to ten years for the various provincial courts – *Parlements* – to register the Edict of Nantes, as many dragged their feet and enforcing it remained very difficult on the ground thereafter. Henry's assassination in 1610 rapidly threatened the guarantees obtained by the Huguenots in 1598. Louis XIII reconquered their strongholds during the religious wars of 1620-1629. By the time of Louis XIV's majority in 1661, Huguenots began facing increasing coercion and persecution. Tax hikes and legal restrictions targeting Calvinists were introduced to coerce them into abjuring their faith. In 1681, military campaigns – *dragonnades* – were launched across southern France to force Huguenots to convert or face execution. This eventually enabled the Sun King to revoke the so-called 'perpetual and irrevocable' Edict of Nantes in October 1685, officially on the grounds that there were no more Protestants in France.

Le Désert

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes opened a long period of clandestinity known to French Protestants as the *Désert*, in reference to the wandering of the Jews for seventy years in the Old Testament. Huguenots remained actively persecuted and discriminated against for nearly a century until the French Revolution. They could no longer worship in public; their marriages and baptisms became invalid in the eyes of the state, unless if performed again by a Catholic priest; children were declared illegitimate, forcibly taken away from their parents to be educated in Catholic schools and convents, and could not inherit from their parents. This ensured that Protestant families remained economically crushed and placed a heavy burden on future generations.[3]

While some 200,000 Huguenots found refuge in northern Europe after the Revocation, most actually converted to Roman Catholicism. Others, however, opted for civil disobedience, refusing to take up arms against their own lawful king. Their main source of inspiration was the charismatic preacher Claude Brousson (1647-1698), a former lawyer at the Parliament of Toulouse who likened their plight to the persecution of the Jews in the Bible. As the leading voice of the Huguenot resistance, Brousson was forced to flee into exile in 1683-1689 and again in 1693-1698, during which he toured northern Europe to raise political support for the French Calvinist cause. He was eventually arrested upon his return and was broken on the wheel in 1698 in front of twenty thousand people.[4]

If the resistance against state persecution manifested itself throughout Languedoc and Dauphiné, it was particularly strong from the beginning in the Cévennes mountains, so much so that hundreds of Protestant Cévenols had been deported to the Caribbean islands and Canada in the late 1680s to repopulate the region with Catholic families.[5] The War of the Cévennes or the Camisards' rebellion, as the conflict became known, broke out in 1702 in response to increasing persecution. It was effectively the last French war of religion, one marked by repeated atrocities. On Palm

[3] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 13.

[4] W. C. Utt, & B. E. Strayer, *The Bellicose Dove: Claude Brousson and Protestant Resistance to Louis XIV, 1647-1698* (Brighton 2003). For another account of Huguenot martyrology in the period, see for example *Relation du Marthire de feu Mr. P. Papus de Laverdagie, executé a Montpelier le huitieme de mars de Lanée 1695* (Berlin 1702).

[5] P. Rolland, 'La Déportation des Huguenots aux «îles de l'Amérique»', *Le Lien des chercheurs cévenols*, 155 (2008) 20-25. C. Frostin, 'Du Peuplement pénal de l'Amérique française aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: hésitations et contradictions du pouvoir royal en matière de déportation', *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 85 (1978) 67-94: 75.

Sunday 1703, Maréchal Montrevel had a mill set on fire, in which 300 Protestants – mostly women, children and the elderly – were worshipping, killing all. By 14 December, over 400 villages and hamlets in 32 parishes had been completely burned to the ground. Thousands of Camisards were killed in this period. Their leaders were eventually caught and executed in the cruelest manner as an example. Roland was shot dead in August 1704, but his body was paraded as a trophy for two days through the streets of Uzès and Nîmes before being burnt in public. Jean Cavalier, whose mother died in prison the same year, saw her body thrown to the dogs. Catinat and Ravanel, the last prominent leaders, were burned alive at the stake in May 1705. The rebellion continued sporadically with decreasing intensity until it was eventually crushed in 1710.[6]

Resistance and Revival

The death of Louis XIV in September 1715 opened a new chapter in the history of French Protestantism. Under the new leadership of the minister Antoine Court (1695-1760), Huguenots worked to revive their Church by holding clandestine assemblies in secret locations. Dozens of ministers were trained by Court in Lausanne and then sent across the south of France to preach at the peril of their lives. From 12 ministers in 1730 to 150 in 1783, they played an essential role in reviving Calvinism in eighteenth-century France.[7]

The reconstruction of the Church was a slow and risky process, as Protestants continued to face repression in the South despite the absence of revolt in Languedoc. Provincial intendants and military commanders on the ground were often keen to show their zeal to Versailles even though persecution of the Huguenots at the national level was already declining.[8] That is how at least 107 ministers and preachers were tortured and executed between 1684 and 1765, and another 61 were sentenced to death in effigy.[9] Parliaments also waged campaigns against Protestant marriages in this period. Those of Bordeaux and Grenoble in the 1740s and 1750s forcibly separated

[6] W. G. Monahan, *Let God Arise: The War and Rebellion of the Camisards* (Oxford 2014).

[7] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 147.

[8] Ibidem, 129.

[9] 'Pasteurs et prédicants martyrs'. Http://www.museedudesert.com/article5918.html (accessed 28 October 2022)

couples, sentenced husbands to life on the galleys, wives to prison and declared their children illegitimate.[10] Unlike ministers, laymen were generally imprisoned rather than executed, as the persecution of Huguenots decreased over time to focus primarily on the most prominent individuals. Hundreds, possibly thousands of Huguenots were arrested on religious grounds in the eighteenth century and detained in the prisons of Montpellier, Montauban, Carcassonne, Lyon, Marseilles, in Fort Brescou near Agde, the Fort of Nîmes and the tower of Crest in Dauphiné.

A better documented punishment for Huguenot men was the galleys. Enslavement on the galleys was only intended for the most zealous Huguenots to set the example for the rest of the community. France had built a fleet of 40 oared vessels by the time of the Revocation, manned among others by 'Turks', north- and west-African, Jewish and even Iroquois slaves.[11] Around 1,550 Huguenots were thus enslaved for religious reasons between 1685 and 1748, roughly 4% of the overall total.[12] Most of these were either condemned for attending clandestine assemblies or attempting to flee abroad. All categories combined, over half of all galley slaves died within two years of detention.[13]

Looking at this tragedy through foreign sources helps shed a new perspective on the persisting brutality of religious persecution in eighteenth-century France. Huguenot refugees and their descendants in the Dutch Republic regularly compiled lists of their enslaved coreligionists in France, whom they assisted financially since 1694 thanks to charitable collections to help purchase their release.[14] Although the Marquis de Rochegude did secure the release of 180 Huguenot galley slaves at the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, many continued to be sentenced to life on the shores thereafter at the instigation of the provincial intendants.[15] Nearly one hundred – 94 to be exact

[10] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 130.

[11] M. Martin, & G. Weiss, *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Galley Slavery in Louis XIV's France* (2022) 16, 30. A. Zysberg, *Les Galériens: Vies et destins de 60 000 forçats sur les galères de France, 1680-1748* (Paris 1987) 59-64.

[12] Zysberg, *Les Galériens*, 102-111.

[13] Ibidem, 371-373.

[14] For the history of the so-called 'fonds des galériens', see Universiteit Bibliotheek Leiden (UBL) AW2 Inv. Nr. 1449, Financiële overzichten van het Fonds des galériens et des prisonniers, 1763-1814.

[15] Geheimen Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, I. HA Rep. 11, no. 2510, fols 58-59, 63-64, 68-70, 81-85.

– French Protestants were indeed sentenced to the galleys between 1713 and 1717, according to the lists presented by the Synod of Bergen-op-Zoom.[16] Some of these galley slaves received donations from their coreligionists in the Dutch Republic. 280*l.* were thus distributed in December 1738 and another 261*l.* in January 1750. According to the same lists, 27 Protestants still remained enslaved in the 1760s, despite the galley corps being dismantled in 1748. A closer look at some of these lists actually suggests an increase of condemnations for matters of religion in the 1750s, including one sentenced to life in 1760 and two respectively sentenced to ten and six years as late as 1762.[17] This unexpected increase during a so-called period of Catholic 'religious indifference' towards Protestants is further corroborated by substantially higher donations collected by Dutch-based Huguenots in the same period. In March 1752, fl.500 (1048*l.*) was raised for Huguenot slaves in Marseilles, and another fl.600 (1231*l.*) in December of the same year, and again fl.635 (1300*l.*) in December 1753. To this must be added fl.484 (1000*l.*) in both November 1752 and September 1753 for the dozens of ministers and prisoners, including women and children, held in Fort Brescou, the Tower of Constance and the Fort of Nîmes.[18]

Women were not spared by the repression either because of their role in the revival of the Huguenot church after 1715. They offered logistical and material support for fugitive ministers in hiding, secretly educated their children according to the Calvinist faith, and paid a heavy price, as a result. When caught or denounced, wives were forcibly separated from their husbands and children. Their heads were often shaved to humiliate them and many were imprisoned for life.

The Tower of Constance in Aigues-Mortes became the most notorious female prison in eighteenth-century Languedoc. At least 130 Protestant women were imprisoned between 1685 and 1768 at the Tower of Constance alone. Detainees lived in atrocious conditions and mostly survived on bread and water. While the number of executions on religious grounds declined over the eighteenth century, as we have seen, an examination of the list of female prisoners in Aigues-Mortes reveals that their numbers actually increased over time, from 17 women in the Tour de Constance in 1723 to at

[16] UBL, AW2 Inv. Nr. 1444, unpaginated printed lists.

[17] Ibidem, 'département de Marseille - Protestans détenus sur les Galères pour la Religion', undated manuscript list.

[18] D. Bien, *The Calas Affair: Persecution, Toleration, and Heresy in Eighteenth-century Toulouse* (Princeton 1960) 25-42. UBL, AW2 Inv. Nr. 1445, unfolioted manuscript bundle.

least 28 by 1730 and about 40 in 1742. Several of them had already suffered for 10, 15 or even 20 years. Some, like nineteen-year-old Suzanne Pagès, remained in prison for years despite suffering from a broken leg and a wound that would not heal. Others were pregnant at the time of their arrest and gave birth in the Tower, where their babies often died.[19]

By far the best-known female prisoner was Marie Durand (1711-1776), sister of the charismatic minister Pierre Durand (1700-1732). Marie was denounced after illegally marrying another Calvinist in 1730. She was imprisoned in the Tower de Constance for 38 years, that is until 1768. After her brother's execution in April 1732, she exhorted her fellow prisoners to embrace their condition as a divine trial and allegedly carved the word 'résister' on the wall of the tower. She embodied in other words the very spirit of resistance to the pressures of the catholic hierarchy who wanted the prisoners to give up their protestant faith. Her survival after an exceptionally long imprisonment later earned her recognition as the greatest Protestant female martyr of the eighteenth century.[20]

By the end of 1745, eight women had died in the Tower. But the dreadful living conditions of the Tower did not deter zealous Huguenots. Although state persecution declined in the second half of the eighteenth century and the prospect of religious tolerance slowly became more plausible, the condition of female prisoners did not improve overnight nor were they released automatically. There were still 25 female prisoners in the Tower in 1754. Six of them were aged between 60 and 83, one was blind, two were crippled, and 16 had children. There were still fourteen female prisoners left in the Tower of Constance in 1766. The last ones were gradually released by the end of 1768, even though evidence suggests that Walloon churches in the Dutch Republic continued to assist financially freed prisoners in southern France who remained deprived of civil rights and economic opportunities until the 1780s.[21]

The *Causes célèbres* and the Debate on Toleration

[19] C. Bost, *Les Martyrs d'Aigues-Mortes. Prisonniers et prisonnières protestants enfermés dans les tours d'Aigues-Mortes et particulièrement dans la tour de Constance, 1686-1768* (Paris 1922).

[20] Y. Krumenacker, 'Marie Durand, une héroïne protestante?', *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 30 (2009) 79-98.

[21] Lambeth Palace Libary, London, MS 1122/3, fols 27-31, 117-118. UBL, AW2 1448, Brieven van lidmaten van de Waalse gemeente te Amsterdam aan personen in Frankrijk over de gelden bestemd voor de Franse protestanten in de gevangenis en op de galeien, 1739-1788.

The 1760s are generally described as a turning point in the persecution of French Protestants and the beginning of a period of de facto tolerance. The Seven Years' War (1756-1763) had mobilised French troops – including Protestants – abroad and coincided with a pragmatic change in policy towards Huguenots at the state level. The war consecrated the rise of Protestant nations in Europe; Louis XV (r.1724-74) relied on the financial support of Swiss bankers, while his official mistress, the Marquise de Pompadour, had become a patron of the *philosophes*. Still, the lives of religious minorities remained in practice governed by the provincial intendants, who retained administrative, fiscal and military powers over their respective provinces.[22] A significant discrepancy therefore remained between an increasingly tolerant and enlightened monarchical rule and the powers and persecution of the local intendants in the provinces. This discrepancy is reflected in the historiography, which has overwhelmingly focussed on the Enlightenment salons in Paris, even though these new philosophical debates that were held in the French capital were by no means representative of the mood in the rest of the country. Voltaire himself highlighted this discrepancy at the time: 'Good sense prevails in Paris over fanaticism, whereas in the provinces fanaticism generally prevails over common sense'.[23] These words were written in reference to several cases of late Protestant persecution by the local authorities in Languedoc, where the reality on the ground remained different from that in Paris and Versailles.

In September 1761, the Huguenot minister François Rochette (1736-1762) was arrested in the town of Caussade in the region of Quercy, where he was about to celebrate a baptism. The authorities found marriage and baptismal registers in his bag as well as donations for the clandestine assemblies of the *Désert*. Rochette was immediately imprisoned and a small group of armed Huguenots led by the de Grenier brothers, three gentlemen glassmakers, attempted to liberate him the following night, but their efforts were easily crushed. All prisoners were then transferred to Toulouse in October 1761. The Huguenot minister Paul Rabaut (1718-1794) wrote to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who, although sympathetic, condemned the rebellion as he was about to publish his controversial *Emile*. Another Huguenot named Ribote-Charon wrote to Voltaire to draw his attention to this case and

[22] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 28-29.
[23] Voltaire, *A Treatise on Religious Toleration* (London 1764) 18.

publicise the trial. The philosophe, then in exile in Ferney, wrote in turn to Maréchal Duc de Richelieu, the governor of lower Guyenne, to appeal to his conscience. Evidently, in this context of increasing state tolerance towards the Huguenots, Voltaire did not believe Rochette's life to be at stake. Upon receiving Richelieu's negative response, he reiterated his plea in favour of Rochette, advocating rather cynically that Rochette should be sentenced to death by the parliament of Toulouse, but pardoned by the king in order to win over Huguenots, whom the philosophe continued to regard with distrust. Despite Voltaire's modest efforts to publicise this affair, Rochette and the de Grenier brothers were all sentenced to death on 18 February 1762 and their supporters to the galleys. The de Grenier brothers were decapitated, according to their noble rank, whereas Rochette was publicly hanged in front of thousands of people. Rochette was the last Protestant minister to be executed in France.[24]

The Calas affair broke out in this context of renewed religious tensions. On 13 October 1761 the body of Marc-Antoine Calas was found strangled in his house on the rue des Filatiers in Toulouse in what appeared to be a suicide. His father, Jean Calas, was a well-to-do cloth merchant and Huguenot, rapidly fell under accusations of murdering his son after the latter had reportedly converted to Catholicism. Three weeks later, Jean Calas was condemned first to be broken on the wheel and second to be burned at the stake for the murder of his son. The sentence was carried through on 10 March 1762 on the place Saint-Georges.[25]

This tragic episode found an international resonance among the Huguenot diaspora and Enlightenment salons thanks to Voltaire's public campaign and the publication of his *Treatise on Religious Toleration* in which he denounced Calas's execution as the epitome of fanaticism. That view has been disputed by David Bien, for whom the Calas affair was never a religious one, but a trial for murder in which Calvinism was considered an aggravating factor. Accordingly, Roman Catholics and Protestants already lived in a state of religious indifference in Toulouse by the mid eighteenth century, with the former representing some 50,000 souls against only 200 for the latter. Many Huguenots belonged to the local urban middle class and there were even

[24] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 155-184. G. Adams, *The Huguenots and French Opinion, 1685-1787: The Enlightenment Debate on Toleration* (Waterloo, Ont. 1991) 156-157.

[25] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 190-245. Bien, *The Calas Affair*, 7-24.

instances of intermarriages with Catholic families. The Calas affair, according to Bien, was an anachronism not just to modern historians, but also to contemporaries.[26]

Although Jean Calas was on paper executed for the murder of his son, the religious nature of this notorious case could not be denied. If the Calas family had not been Protestants, there is little doubt that the outcome would have been different considering the tenuous evidence against them.[27] Jack Thomas has likewise recently provided evidence of the hostility and prejudice of the Toulouse authorities against Calvinists at the time, calling them monsters, barbarians and traitors.[28] There is also evidence that several clergymen attending the trial hoped to postpone Calas's execution by a few weeks to coincide with the bicentenary of the massacre of the Huguenots, to be celebrated in great pomp with the inauguration of a monument representing the Church crushing the Calvinist heresy. The popularity of this festival is well established:

> In this city [Toulouse] is annually solemnized, by public procession and bonfires, the massacre of four thousand heretical citizens about two centuries ago.[29] It hath been to no purpose that six arrests of council have been issued against this abominable practice; the people of Toulouse still celebrate this horrid festival.[30] […] The circumstance, however, which more particularly accelerated his [Calas] sentence, was the approach of the above-mentioned extraordinary festival. […] It was publicly said, the scaffold on which John Calas out to be broken on the wheel, would be one of the greatest embellishments to the splendour of the festival; that Providence had evidently furnished such delinquents to be sacrificed as victims to the holy Roman Catholic religion.[31]

Voltaire, Protestant ministers and liberal thinkers may perhaps have exaggerated the bigotry of the Toulouse magistrates and inhabitants, as Bien has claimed, but the Calas affair certainly was a religious one, whose international resonance marked a turning point in the persecution of

[26] Bien, *The Calas Affair*, 4-5, 25-42.

[27] Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 335.

[28] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 185-187.

[29] i.e. in 1562, ten years before the notorious St Bartholomew massacre.

[30] Voltaire, *A Treatise on Religious Toleration*, 6. Bien, *The Calas Affair*, 49-50.

[31] Voltaire, *A Treatise on Religious Toleration*, 9-10.

Huguenots. Following Voltaire's *Treatise on Religious Toleration* the next year (1763), the philosophe took the case to the Conseil du Roi and obtained Calas's full rehabilitation two years later.[32]

A third and similar affair broke out in the region around the same time when on 4 January 1762 the body of the young Elisabeth Sirven was found in a well in Saint-Alby near Castres. Sirven was suffering from mental disorders and had been placed in a convent, where nuns specialised in the conversion of Calvinists. As her condition deteriorated, she had been sent back to her family until she disappeared a few months later and died in unclear circumstances. Rumours soon began to spread that her family had killed her for converting to Catholicism. With Rochette and Calas respectively executed in February and March of the same year, the Sirven family was well aware of what awaited them and fled to Switzerland shortly before the judges sentenced them to death. Their bodies were burnt in effigy in 1764. They too received Voltaire's public support after visiting him in Ferney, but the family as a whole would not be rehabilitated until November 1771.[33]

The so-called irreversible path to religious tolerance that allegedly began in the early 1760s was anything but a smooth process. Scholarly focus on enlightenment debates and the Calas affair in Toulouse may not reflect the reality of the daily relations between Huguenots and Catholics in the rest of Languedoc and neighbouring provinces more generally. Elsewhere in Languedoc, and especially in the Cévennes, repression and persecution remained common. As we saw earlier, men continued to be sentenced to life on the galleys on religious grounds into the 1760s and women remained imprisoned into the next decade. The repression against Protestant marriages continued in the same period, with at least 15 cases recorded in Languedoc alone between 1759 and 1774.[34] Even if state persecution had largely declined in the second half of the eighteenth century, life was not necessarily easier for most of them.

A telling example of the ongoing plight of the Huguenots in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and one taking place outside of Languedoc, is the case of the Gibert brothers, two itinerant ministers preaching clandestinely to revive the Church. Jean-Louis Gibert (1722-1773), the eldest, had been very active in Poitou and Saintonge from the 1750s. He defied

[32] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*, 247-313. Adams, *The Huguenots and French Opinion*, 211-228.

[33] Thomas, *Les Protestants du Languedoc et la justice royale*,, 315-378.

[34] Ibidem, 142-145.

persecution despite having been sentenced to death *in absentia* and built clandestine houses of prayer based on his belief in more tolerant times coming ahead. As his hopes failed to materialise by 1763, that is during the campaign to rehabilitate Jean Calas, Jean-Louis Gibert organised with help from the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Secker, the emigration of a few hundred Protestants towards South Carolina, where they founded the colony of New Bordeaux in 1764.[35]

Jean-Louis's younger brother, Etienne (1736-1817), himself a minister in Saintonge then in Bordeaux until 1770, also went into exile in London a decade later after coming under fire for his proximity with Moravian missionaries in the city. The fact that he was present in Paris when the so-called Edict of Tolerance was being drafted in 1787 and that he did not return to France after Protestants gained freedom of religion during the French Revolution, may be seen as another indication of how sensitive and fragile the religious condition of French Protestants still remained at the end of the eighteenth century.[36]

Conclusion

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes arguably represents one of the greatest episodes of religious persecution in early modern Europe. Not only did it follow decades of coercion and brutal repression, it also opened a century-long period of clandestinity in an age often associated with religious tolerance. That the philosophes spent so much time and energy debating religious toleration is in itself an indication that discrimination, intolerance and persecution remained the norm on the ground. Other religious minorities in the region – Multipliants, Quakers, New Zionists, Couflaïres – faced a similar fate to that of the Huguenots. Many were executed, imprisoned or enslaved on the galleys during the first half of the eighteenth century, and continued to be closely monitored by local authorities into the 1770s.[37] Looking at

[35] O. Stanwood, 'From the Desert to the Refuge: The Saga of New Bordeaux', *French Historical Studies*, 40 (2017) 5-32.

[36] Daniel Benoît, *Les Frères Gibert: Pasteurs du "Désert" puis du "Refuge."* (Paris 1889).

[37] For an overview of these religious minorities, see L. Laborie, 'From English Trembleurs to French Inspirés: A Transnational Perspective on the Origins of French Quakerism (1654-1789)', in A. Kremers & B. Heal (eds.), *Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform* (Gottingen 2017) 225-244, especially 238-242.

religious persecution in France from a foreign perspective only reinforces this reality. The fact that the Huguenot refugees in the Dutch Republic continued to raise funds for their coreligionists on French galleys or in prisons until the French Revolution speaks volumes about the reality of their living conditions in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

It was not until the Edict of Tolerance in November 1787 that the condition of the Huguenots finally began to improve. The edict restored civil rights to all non-Catholics by legally recognising their marriages and baptisms, thereby legitimating thousands of clandestine unions and births. However progressive as its name sounds, the Edict of Tolerance was in reality *not* an edict of tolerance. First because the word 'tolérance' does not appear anywhere in the document for the simple reason that Protestants did not recover their religious freedom. Instead Roman Catholicism was reaffirmed as France's official Church and access to public office and education remained banned. Still Huguenots largely welcomed the Edict for giving them a legal existence and therefore rights for the first time since 1685. Only with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 did they recover their freedom of conscience and rights to military and public offices, and their freedom of worship with the constitution of 1791. The royal edict of December 1790 also granted French citizenship to all foreign-born Huguenots whose parents had emigrated abroad for religious reasons. The number of those who returned remains unknown, but was probably limited.[38]

[38]Adams, *The Huguenots and French Opinion*, 295-306. 'Retablissement-de-la-liberte-religieuse'. Https://museeprotestant.org/notice/retablissement-de-la-liberte-religieuse/ (accessed 28 October 2022)