

## 84. THE SUN KING AND THE HUGUENOTS

In 1643 Louis XIV became king of France. Louis XIII had died, and his young son succeeded him. He remained king for seventy-two years. He was only a child when his father died and could not rule yet, so someone else reigned for him.

In the previous chapter, we told you about how Cardinal Richelieu ruled. After him, Cardinal Mazarin became the most powerful man in France, governing for Louis XIV. But when Mazarin died in 1661, Louis XIV took the reigns of government in hand and ruled France for fifty-four years.

Louis XIV was a wicked monarch and a staunch Roman Catholic. Evil Jesuits influenced him. Years of suffering and oppression began again for the Huguenots, and since they had lost their fortresses, they couldn't do a thing about it. The Jesuits did all they could to break the Huguenots' power and deprive them of their liberty.



*Louis XIV, King of France, is shown here in his coronation finery in a portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud.*

Slowly but surely, the Jesuits forced the Huguenots back. They despised and tormented them.

The Edict of Nantes, the treaty that ensured their freedom of religion and conscience, still existed but was constantly violated and broken. The Jesuits made sure of that. They taught that it was unnecessary to keep promises made to heretics. It began slowly. The Jesuits were crafty. They understood they must not fiercely persecute the Huguenots, as that could start another bloody Huguenot war. The desperate Huguenots would take up arms, and France would suffer too many casualties. So bit by bit, they tried to bring the Huguenots back into the Roman Catholic Church. In honest ways? Oh no, that's not necessary for heretics! The devious ways were the best! Here are a few examples.

### DEVIOUS TACTICS

A Huguenot is lying on his deathbed when suddenly, without permission, a Roman Catholic priest enters. The family and nearest acquaintances stand around the dying man. Unashamed, the priest joins them at the bedside. The priest then tries to bring that dying Huguenot back to the Roman Catholic faith with friendly, flattering words. He asks if he isn't sorry that he left the Roman Catholic faith. Now that he is so close to death, he asks if he wants to become Roman Catholic again. Wouldn't that be much better?

When a Huguenot, who was often too sick to understand what it was all about, consented, the priest left with an evil grin and spread the word that a Huguenot had repented on his deathbed and returned to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholics didn't only do this to the dying but also to the living. They asked little children aged six or seven to join the Roman Catholic church. They made all sorts of wonderful promises to those children. Of course, those children did not understand what it was all about. They looked at the priest with big, astonished eyes. The fantastic promises the priest gave



*'Priest teaching children the Catholic Faith,  
drawing by Jules-Alexis Meunier.*

caused their faces to shine with joy. They said, "Yes." Then the wicked priest told them they had to repeat after him, "I reject my faith." When the children repeated that, he would take them with him and give them to a Roman Catholic family or send them to a monastery where they taught them to be Roman Catholic. Those poor children were never allowed to return to their parents.

On top of that, the parents had to pay for their board. One cannot imagine a more disgraceful, outrageous injustice. When the Huguenot parents complained, the priest sharply told them this was the child's choice. They had voluntarily returned to the Roman Catholic Church. Many Huguenot parents shed bitter tears because they had permanently lost their children!

This act was *sooo* mean! But the Roman Catholic priests did not recoil from such sinful acts, for wasn't it for the children's salvation? That made every devious action permissible. They achieved their goal when those children became faithful Roman Catholics again. Only God knows how many children were 'kidnapped' this way.

The Huguenots were powerless in the face of all those sneaky, corrupt and cruel practices. If a Huguenot girl married a Roman Catholic boy or vice versa, the clergy compelled them to raise the children they received as Roman Catholics.

If a Huguenot had become poor through setbacks like sickness or crop failure and got into debt, a Roman Catholic priest would offer him a large sum of money. Accepting this money would immediately release him from all his worries and troubles. He need not pay that money back either; it was a gift, *but* that Huguenot must become Roman Catholic again! That was all they asked in return. What an enormous temptation for those poor people because that money could pay off all their debts

in one go! And yes, some Huguenots succumbed to that temptation and accepted that money.

In such devious ways, the clergy tried to bribe the Huguenots. Rome was happy to spend money on that.

You may ask:

"Did the Huguenots fall for that? Then they were not *good* Huguenots."

That is true. Those who became Roman Catholic to escape debt and difficulties were not true Huguenots.

We need not be too surprised that such things happened.

Just look around. How many church members these days live indifferently? How many church members sometimes do not come to church for months? They are indifferent to serving God the way *He* wants. It is sad but true.

Such people were also among the Huguenots, and the Roman Catholic priests chose those people to practice their evil bribery on. When they succeeded, they boasted loudly that they had "converted" many Huguenots again.

### MEAN TACTICS

We could mention many more examples. The clergy ridiculed and bullied the Huguenots in other ways too.



Here are a few more examples.

When a Huguenot died, the clergy did not permit them to bury the body at midday as was the custom, but it had to be done very early in the morning or late in the evening.

Why? They also had their rights, didn't they? The Edict of Nantes was still in effect with its promise of liberty. But the clergy didn't care about that! *Anything* was allowed if it made the Huguenots become Roman Catholic again. The loss of certain freedoms was their own fault. The Roman Catholics *were* allowed to bury their dead in the middle of the day. Naturally!

When the Huguenots gathered in their church buildings, they sang Psalms. We do that, too. But suddenly, during the psalm singing, someone would pound on the door and shout that they must immediately stop singing. Sometimes the singing stopped in the middle of a line. Why did that happen?

Just look.

A Roman Catholic procession or pageant is coming past. While it passes the church, the people must stop singing. A heretical song and a Roman Catholic pageant clash. So they pounded on the door of the church. The Huguenots didn't dare to keep singing because they feared the vengeance of the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics enjoyed disturbing the religious services of the Huguenots as much as possible. The more they could torment the Huguenots, the better the Roman Catholic priests liked it. Why not? Those Huguenots were only 'cursed heretics' anyway!

Roman Catholic spies often visited Huguenot church services to criticise the minister's sermons. Woe to the minister who dared to say anything against the 'holy virgin!' They would immediately accuse him of heresy and punish him cruelly and



*A protestant pastor addressing a secret Huguenot assembly <https://fineartamerica.com/>*

severely. The Roman Catholics really had it in for the Huguenot ministers. Some were whipped and ill-treated. Others who had preached 'false doctrines' were imprisoned or banished.

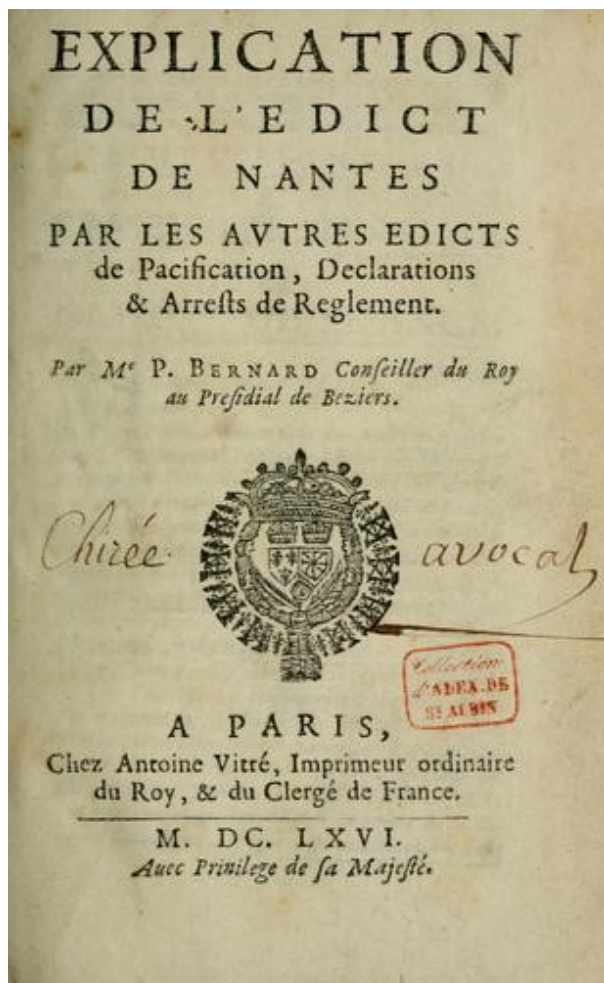
## OTHER INJUSTICES

The Roman Catholics constantly violated the Edict of Nantes. But what could the Huguenots do against that? It was no use complaining to the government. Often, government officials would deeply insult them. They would only laugh in their face and mock them.

All that malicious, mean treatment made the Huguenots very bitter. They had lost their strong fortresses. Just think of their last stronghold, La Rochelle, which had to surrender to Cardinal Richelieu in 1628.

The Roman clergy bullied and ridiculed the Huguenots in many ways, as they did all they could to exclude them from society. They shamelessly heaped injustice after injustice on them.

The Edict of Nantes stipulated that the courts of justice must be half Roman Catholic and half Huguenots. That gradually changed. When a Huguenot judge died, they had to appoint a new judge from the Huguenots. That was the rule. But



Copy of the Edict of Nantes, 1666.  
<https://openlibrary.org/>

that did not happen. The Roman Catholics appointed another Roman Catholic judge instead, so finally, the courts of justice consisted of only Roman Catholic judges. Because of that, the courts of justice were no longer courts of *justice* but of *injustice* because the Huguenots never obtained a fair hearing, even though their complaints were entirely valid. The Roman Catholics could do as they pleased; they always acquitted other Roman Catholics but pronounced innocent Huguenots guilty. *That* was not justice! But Rome was permitted to do anything to those 'heretics'!

The Huguenots had their own schools where Huguenot teachers taught their children. The Edict of Nantes stipulated this. But Rome changed this too. When a Huguenot teacher died, Rome replaced him with a Roman Catholic teacher. That's how Huguenot schools soon had many Roman Catholic teachers who instructed the

children in the Roman Catholic religion. That was unjust, but it happened.

If a Huguenot worked for a Roman Catholic employer to earn a living for his wife and children, his boss would sack him. That way, the boss plunged a family into great poverty.

Why?

Wasn't that man doing his job properly?

Was he lazy, dishonest, or impertinent?

Not at all! The opposite was true, but he was a Huguenot.

If he became Roman Catholic, he could have his job back again.

The same thing still happens. Rome never changes! If there was a Huguenot store in a city or village where Roman Catholics were also customers, then those Roman Catholics were incited by the priests not to buy from and support those 'heretics.' If they did not obey immediately, they threatened their members with the curse of the Roman Catholic Church. That way, business fell fast, and those Huguenot stores could no longer make a decent living.

The Edict of Nantes also stipulated that the Huguenots should have seats in the French government. Despite that, the Roman clergy removed Huguenot mayors and threw out Huguenot government members, carelessly reducing them to beggary. Why? Because they were Huguenots!

*'Let them become Roman Catholic!'* they thought.

This injustice went on for many years. Is it any wonder that thousands of Huguenots migrated to foreign countries? They moved to the Netherlands, England, Germany or anywhere where the Roman clergy would not molest them. The Roman Catholics became ever bolder, nastier and sneakier in harassing and tormenting the Huguenots. And why not? They were only 'cursed heretics', anyway! *Let them become Roman Catholic!* But it would get even worse.

The Jesuits made sure of that.

Their goal was to exterminate the Huguenots, and they wouldn't rest until they achieved it.

### FROM BAD TO WORSE

"Don't touch that food! That's for us!"



Rough, rude men storm into the dining room of a Huguenot home where the family had just gathered around the table to eat dinner. Alas, their meal was rudely disturbed. Those wicked men drove away those parents and children; they would beat them out if they did not go fast enough. Then, roaring with laughter, those men sat down and enjoyed the evicted family's dinner. If the meal was a little scanty, they raided the cellar to see if there was more to eat there. They emptied cupboards and carelessly destroyed many things with their rough behaviour. They killed chickens, pigs, and other livestock and compelled the mother to cook that meat for them. If she didn't do it fast enough or didn't prepare it to their liking, she might receive a kick or get abused. If the children cried, they received a punch in the face. Often blood spurted from their nose and mouth. This sort of thing happened daily in the homes of the Huguenots. First here, then there.

Who were those scoundrels who conducted themselves so offensively? Scoundrels? How dare you call them that! They were soldiers of the royal army! But they acted like beasts in the homes of the Huguenots and destroyed beautiful, expensive furniture or deliberately smashed the family belongings to pieces. At night they slept in the beds of the Huguenot family.

And the family itself? They had no choice but to sleep on the hay in the barn or the stone floor if there was no hay or straw. Their beds are for the soldiers of the king of France!

Soldiers?

They are a gang of robbers!

But is all that allowed? Is there no justice left in France? Why are families of decent French subjects tormented, robbed, and ill-treated? Why?

Ah, they are only Huguenots; they belong to those accursed heretics!

Let them then become Roman Catholic!

Next to that tormented Huguenot family lives a Roman Catholic family. Those French soldiers do not bother them! They treat those Roman Catholic citizens politely and with courtesy. But Huguenot families are ill-treated. For them, plundering and cruelty were the order of the day. When they had provoked a Huguenot father to the limit so that he lost control and resisted, they beat him to death or hanged him on the pear tree in front of the house. The soldiers of his majesty, the king of France, did not allow themselves to be insulted by a heretic. No way!

It is 1681. The Roman clergy and French authorities sent strong detachments of French cavalry to areas where many Huguenots still lived to *compel* them to become Roman Catholic again.



*An illustration from a children's history book presenting the Dragonnades from its least violent angle: the looting of foodstuffs.*  
<https://www.sombre-plume.fr/la-france-est-elle-un-pays-chretien>

Those French horsemen were called dragoons and were billeted only with Huguenots. Roman Catholics were exempt from the billeting program. The Huguenots suffered terribly at the hands of those dragoons.

They were no longer boss in their own homes.

History books call this compulsory billeting of dragoons the *dragonnades*.

Understandably, many Huguenots became discouraged and gave up the struggle in despair. Some finally became Roman Catholic again to get rid of the misery. True, those people forgot the Bible text: "Be faithful unto death!" but humanly speaking, it was very understandable. The Roman Catholics made life unbearable for them.

Many thousands who would not become Roman Catholic again fled. They left their house or farm, village, and country and travelled to foreign lands, sometimes losing everything. Thankfully, the people in those foreign lands received them warmly. There, those poor oppressed people could finally rest in safety.

As a consequence, France lost thousands of its best subjects. Louis XIV realised that too. That's why he closed the borders a year later, in 1682.

They didn't need to flee! Why didn't those stubborn people become Roman Catholic? Then they wouldn't get harassed but be left alone and live a peaceful, undisturbed life! It was their own fault that they were tormented and oppressed. Why didn't they give in?

Three years later, in 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes. He and his cronies had already ignored it for a long time, but it was still an existing law. However, since October 1685, the Edict of Nantes no longer existed. They passed new laws prohibiting public worship services for Huguenots. This meant Huguenots were no longer allowed to assemble in their churches. Even worse, they demolished Huguenot church buildings. The Roman Catholics destroyed more than eight hundred churches in France. They closed the Huguenots' schools, took the Huguenot children away from

their parents and educated them in Roman Catholic institutions or monasteries. They sent the Huguenot preachers and teachers to the dreadful galleys, where they soon died miserable deaths. The persecution raged severely. Other ministers were hanged or broken on the wheel, meaning the Roman clergy tortured them horribly.

Fleeing was forbidden. Soldiers guarded the border. Anyone who tried to escape and got caught was mercilessly sent to the galleys. (prison ships)

### ESCAPE TO A SAFE HAVEN

And yet, after the dissolution of the Edict of Nantes, more than half a million Huguenots *did* flee. They defied the prohibition of the king. Leaving everything behind, they travelled over impassable routes across the border. Many of them succumbed on the way.

Some Huguenots would pack their little children into suitcases and carry them across the border like that. Others disguised themselves as pilgrims and managed to escape France that way.

Here was a fulfilment of what God said in the epistle to the Hebrews "... they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ... they wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11:37-38).



Huguenots leaving France <https://historiek.net/>





*Huguenots leaving France. <https://www.history.com>*

Those fugitives were called *refugees*.

The Netherlands also accepted thousands of refugees, nursed and cared for them with hearts full of compassion. The Dutch people built entire suburbs for those poor, impoverished refugees and assisted them as much as possible. They established churches in the south of the Netherlands where the refugees could freely hold church services. Two hundred ministers came to Holland and preached in those churches. They were called Walloon churches. But those poor refugees could not support those ministers, could they? They needed financial help themselves. They had nothing! But that wasn't a problem; they did not need to pay anything, as the Dutch government paid those Huguenot ministers. The Netherlands benefited because France's most diligent and industrious people had fled there. Many French names still remind us of those refugees. But France itself became impoverished. And still, Louis XIV relentlessly continued to persecute the Huguenots.

The Roman clergy kept stirring up Louis in all sorts of ways. He was lavishly praised and glorified by them. One priest said: "Our hearts beat with admiration for Louis' piety. Let our acclaim echo right up to heaven!" There is only one

word for such unwholesome flattery: "Bah!"

Do you see that the Roman clergy was guilty? For they were! Rome was the instigator of all the atrocities and persecution in France.

### THE CAMISARD WAR

For the rest, we can be brief.

We have seen that hundreds of thousands of Huguenots fled, but not all of them left the country. In the south of France lies a mountain range called the Cevennes.

They stayed in those inaccessible regions. There they established churches and came together in caves and dens. They called themselves the "Churches of the Desert."

But even there, the Roman clergy did not leave them in peace.

They stirred up Louis XIV to send troops there. They scattered the Huguenots' secret meetings.



*Soldiers surprise Huguenots in their cave-church. Wikipedia.*

The soldiers committed horrific massacres, sometimes murdering three to four hundred people at a time, including women and children. Eventually, a terrible revolt broke out in the Cevennes Mountains, recorded in history as The Camisard War.

This war lasted from 1702 to 1705.

Louis XIV tried to suppress the revolt with savage cruelty. Horrendous things happened. They say that soldiers caused shiploads of Huguenots to sink in the Loire River so that all the people in those ships drowned miserably. Some writers say more than one hundred thousand people perished in that war. The Camisard War ended in 1705. The king and the Roman clergy smothered in blood the Huguenots' last desperate attempt to resist.

And yet Louis XIV did not succeed in exterminating Protestantism. The church has always remained. But he was *almost* successful.

And the consequences?

For France, they were beyond repair. True, Rome had conquered, but at what price? Deterioration, poverty, revolution!! We hope to say a few things about that in another chapter.

Louis XIV! They called him the 'Sun King.'  
Why?

His reign had not been very beneficial to France. He had not brought the sun of prosperity but the night of adversity to his country. Bloody wars weakened his realm both within and without France's borders. His pact with the Roman clergy would come back to haunt him. We will hear more about that later.

His sinful life ended in 1715. It must have been terrifying for him to appear before God's judgment seat with hands dripping with the blood of God's children! It would have been better for him to have never been born. Just think: God's wrath and holy vengeance will rest on him forever! Dreadful!

## QUESTIONS

1. What effect did the Jesuits have on Louis XIV?
2. Why was the Edict of Nantes violated and broken by the Jesuits?

3. Why didn't the Jesuits suggest full-scale persecution of the Huguenots?
4. Summarise the cunning plans of the Jesuits in each of the following cases:
  - a. Dying Huguenots
  - b. Small children
  - c. Huguenot-Catholic marriages
  - d. Huguenots in debt.
  - e. Burial times for Huguenots
  - f. Huguenot worship services
  - g. Courts of justice
  - h. Huguenot schools
  - i. Huguenot work opportunities
  - j. Huguenot business
  - k. Personal family life in the home
5. Who were the dragoons?
6. List some ways the Huguenots reacted to these intolerable situations.
7. Why did the king make a law forbidding the Huguenots to leave the land?
8. What further changes did revoking the Edict of Nantes bring? List five.
9. How did some of the refugees escape?
10. Identify the following:
  - a. Walloon church
  - b. Churches of the Desert
  - c. The Camisard War.
11. How was France weakened during the reign of Louis XIV?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Think of another consequence for France due to King Louis's policies towards the Huguenots.
2. Read Revelation 13. This chapter speaks of a time when no one may buy or sell unless he had the mark of the beast. There are similarities during this period of Huguenot persecution. Explain how we can relate this period to the time described in Revelation 13.
3. Briefly explain the Jesuit plan of exterminating Protestantism in France.