

82. A Disgraceful Betrayal. The St Bartholomew Night. (Aug 23rd, 1572)

It is busy in Paris. There is a festive sense of expectancy in the air. Thousands of people, young and old, have travelled to the capital city of France. Roman Catholics and Huguenots are organising the celebration of a reconciliation wedding.

A reconciliation wedding?

What's that?

As explained in the previous chapter, in 1570, the bloody Huguenot war in France came to a sudden end with the peace of St. Germain. Authorities suddenly and unexpectedly stopped all the cruel, bloody persecution. France could recover from the heavy knocks it had received.

Peace between Roman Catholics and Huguenots! From now on, they would live together in harmony.

They would no longer be at war.

Freedom of religion for everyone!

They would learn to tolerate each other.



*Gaspard de
Coligny*

Only in Paris and some other large cities the church services for the Huguenots were still prohibited. Gaspard de Coligny, the main leader of the Huguenots, daily visited the palace as a friend of the young king. It *looked*

like Catherine De' Medici and the king were genuine about reconciliation. According to King Charles IX and his mother, Catherine De' Medici, this wedding would end the mutual hatred and envy. Catherine even gave her consent to this reconciliation wedding.

WHO IS GETTING MARRIED?



*Henry of
Navarre*

Henry of Navarre, one of the leaders of the Huguenots, is to marry *Margaret*, the daughter of Catherine De' Medici and the sister of King Charles IX.



*Margaret De
Medici*
https://reign-cw.fandom.com/wiki/Princess_Margaret_of_Valois

It couldn't be better!

Many people are busy preparing for the wedding. Invitations for this magnificent royal wedding are sent out to the most prominent Roman Catholics, as well as the most prominent Huguenots.

Reports of the reconciliation between the Roman

Catholics and Huguenots even spread to other countries.



Catherine De' Medici.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/>

In Rome, Pius V is pope, the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. He also hears what is happening in France. An expression of displeasure and amazement appears on his face.

"What on earth is going on?" he mumbles. "Are they getting friendly with those wicked heretics in France? I am disappointed in them!"

He wants to know more about it and, if possible, prevent that plan from happening. He sends an ambassador, a cardinal, to Paris. The cardinal requests an interview with the king of



Pope Pius V
<https://www.catholicstv.org/vincentholiness.org/>

France. The royal court receives him very kindly, but he remains stern and reserved. He tells the royal family that the pope is very displeased and is observing the developments in France with great unease. He asks for clarification so that he can report back to his master. Soon after, he leaves the palace. A sly smile plays about his lips, and now and then, he nods approvingly. But the busy, happy Huguenots shopping in Paris do not see that. The papal ambassador quickly travels back to Rome and reports to Pope Pius V all he has heard. Then the pope smiles a cunning smile. He won't send a second ambassador. The cardinal apparently received a positive answer because both the pope and the cardinal are pleased. The royal family had assured them that all their plans

would be for the welfare of the Roman Catholic Church. The pope need not worry about anything; it will all work out just fine.

Meanwhile, the French palace continues to prepare everything for the royal wedding. From all over the country, the most prominent Huguenots come to Paris, including many nobles. Lots of them take their wives and children with them. They enjoy the outing. During the day, those children play and romp with their Roman Catholic neighbour children.

And why not?

That is normal.



Jeanne
d'Albret

The mother of Henry of Navarre, the God-fearing Jeanne d' Albret, also travels to Paris to become acquainted with her future daughter-in-law and the other members of the royal family. Catherine De' Medici and the king warmly welcome her. They both do

their best to make everything as pleasant as possible for her. Yet Jeanne d' Albret is not happy with the proposed marriage of her son. She is indignant and frightened when she sees the sinful lifestyle at the palace. Will her son live in this godless environment? The thought makes her shudder. Won't her child be tempted to join in with this wickedness? She is afraid that Henry may feel at home there. Oh, her son's spiritual welfare is worth more to her than all the royal court's riches and splendour. One can easily understand that she remains very aloof and does not respond well to the kindness of Catherine De' Medici. She fails to notice Catherine's false, somewhat mocking glances at her.

THE KING AND DE COLIGNY BECOME FRIENDS

During those days of preparation, the king and De Coligny meet every day. The calm and dignified Gaspard De Coligny greatly influences the young king. Those two have many serious conversations together. The king learns to love the noble and sincere De Coligny because he realises that De Coligny means what he says and that he desires the best for him. De Coligny seeks the welfare of

France and the royal family. This sincerity appeals to Charles IX.

At times they discuss the situation in France and make plans to make France prosper. Other times they discuss the current critical situation in the Netherlands, where a handful of Dutchmen are desperately fighting the powerful Spanish world empire.



King Charles IX,
12 yrs old
<https://en.wikipedia.org/>

"Shouldn't we help and encourage those brave Dutchmen?" asks De Coligny, and the king nods in agreement. Eventually, the French monarch approves a plan to send an army of Huguenots to assist the oppressed Dutch people. They finalise the plans. Together, France and the Netherlands will attack Spain. They contacted William of Orange, who is leading the war in the Netherlands. As De Coligny leaves the palace, Catherine De Medici watches him through a window. Her eyes flash fire and flicker with hatred and rage. The hatred that stirs within her distorts her face. But De Coligny, deep in thought as he walks, is unaware of any possible threat. He does not know that the queen is having secret meetings with the influential Roman Catholic dukes Charles and Henry de Guise. Remember, they were the leaders of the Roman Catholic party!

SUSPICIONS BEGIN TO RISE

Henry de Guise was the son of Francis de Guise, who, during their church service, massacred 60 Huguenots in Vassy and left many more wounded.

Catherine, Charles, and Henry carefully excluded Gaspard De Coligny from their secret meetings.

The wedding date quickly approaches; they have set a date for August 18, 1572.

Everything seems to be in perfect order, but then Jeanne d' Albret, the God-fearing mother of Henry of Navarre, the future bridegroom, suddenly dies.

That frightens the Huguenots and makes them suspicious!

How could that have happened?

Some of the Huguenots lose trust.

Rumours abound.

Some say that Catherine De' Medici presented Jeanne d' Albret with a pair of beautiful gloves. "And", they whisper, "those gloves had poison inside them." They think someone cunningly murdered her. Alarm fills the hearts of many. Are these rumours true?

When competent doctors examine the corpse of Jeanne d'Albret, they report no findings of any trace of poison. They do find an ugly, malignant growth in one of her lungs. Then the uneasiness of the Huguenots fades. Jeanne d' Albret seems to have died a natural death.

Is that true?

We do not know.

God only knows.

We dare to say that Catherine De'Medici would have been quite capable of poisoning Jeanne d'Albret, considering the rest of this history. Then we must also put a large question mark behind the report of those doctors.

Whatever the case, the Huguenots remain in Paris.

On August 18, 1572, the royal marriage takes place.

Paris joyfully celebrates this special occasion for three days!

On August 22, Gaspard de Coligny walks calmly to his hotel. He has just left the palace, where he and the king further discussed their plans to assist the Dutch.

Suddenly: a gunshot!

De Coligny is wounded in his left shoulder, and a bullet shattered the index finger of his right hand. This cowardly attempted murder starts another wave of fear amongst the Huguenots.

Many have lost all trust in the situation.

Their confidence is shaken a second time.

Some quickly pack their bags and leave as soon as they can.

But many others stand around and talk and end up staying in Paris because they hear that the king visited De Coligny in his hotel room. The king spoke very kindly and showed sympathy for the wounded leader of the Huguenots.

"You have the wound, but I have the anguish," says Charles IX. He promises that he will find and severely punish the attacker. He probably even meant those words as he had become big friends with De Coligny. Yet, despite many so-called investigations, the attacker is not found. Of course not.

Catherine De' Medici had hired him to eliminate De Coligny!

But the king did not know that!

Catherine had not told him...

ONE HORRIFIC NIGHT

It is the night of August 23, 1572. It is quiet in Paris. Most people are asleep, except in the royal palace, where they are still celebrating. Many nobles, including Huguenots, attending the feast do not think of sleeping.

It is a quiet, balmy evening. But that pleasant calm is deceptive!

It is way past midnight.



The Royal Marriage <https://www.pinterest.com.au/>

Suddenly a pistol shot cracks.
 And then ... then a hellish uproar breaks out!
 Suddenly the streets are full of people; they all
 have a white band around their arm and a white
 cross on their hats.
 That is how they are recognised.
 The streets are full of turmoil.
 We hear boots kicking and smashing in doors!



Preparation for the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Painting by Kārlis Hūns (1868) Wikipedia

We hear terrified screams of women and cries of
 men in mortal fear!
 We hear the wounded moaning.
 The white-banded men fire shots
 everywhere.
 What is going on?

The massacre of the Huguenots has
 started.
 What?
 The massacre of the Huguenots?
 Haven't the Roman Catholics and the
 Huguenots just been reconciled?
 Hadn't they agreed on a peace treaty
 two years ago? (The Peace of St
 Germain 1570)

They have just celebrated a
 reconciliation wedding!
 Ah, all that was only show!
 It was all despicable, wicked deception!
 Catherine De' Medici and her helpers
 had set up the meanest trap ever for
 the Huguenots.

All that friendliness was blatant hypocrisy,
 loathsome deceit!
 It had been Catherine's well-orchestrated plan,
 which began with the peace treaty of St Germain.
 Now we understand why the papal ambassador
 had a smile on his face after he visited Catherine
 De' Medici.
 With that 'friendliness', the Roman Catholics lured
 the Huguenots into their trap.
 The most prominent Huguenots had come to Paris
 to be slaughtered like sheep!

On this horrific bloody night, murder abounds in
 the streets of Paris. Hundreds and thousands of
 poor startled Huguenots are killed, slaughtered
 like animals—their cries of distress tear through
 the quiet of the summer night. Men, women, and
 children are ruthlessly murdered.
 Even old people are slaughtered without mercy.
 Many try to flee!
 However, their attempts fail; chains have been
 stretched across the streets to make escape
 difficult; running in mortal fear, the Huguenots
 trip over these chains and are instantly killed by
 those chasing them. The scenes are indescribable,
 too dreadful to relate.

Yet we need to mention a few of these because
 this event may not be forgotten. Not because it is
 so nice but as a sharp accusation against Rome,



Catherine De' Medici and her courtiers outside the Louvre, after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Wikipedia

who planned, approved, and applauded this massacre.

We do not intend to sow hatred against the Roman Catholic people, but we may not hush up this history either; this *has* happened, and we may not forget it. God does not forget, either.

Children playing together only a few hours ago now try to murder each other in the middle of this horrific night. Some Roman Catholic children strangle their playmates from the day before without realising what they are doing. The grown-up people urge them on. They toss hundreds of corpses into the Seine River, which is soon coloured red with Huguenot blood.

Look, a man emerges from a house that has had its door kicked open. He is carrying a two-year-old child. The child gives him a friendly smile, puts his little hands in his beard, and plays with it. And then ... that brute takes his knife, stabs that sharp steel into the body of that innocent child, and then laughs and tosses that youngster into the river. Grinning, that murderer returns to look for new little victims. He has lost all sense of human decency and compassion. There are no words for such cruelty.

And look over there!

No, we won't tell you anymore. This single act of cruelty is sufficient. We related this incident to show you how satanic the Roman Catholic attack was in how they murdered the Huguenots, sparing neither old nor young. What happened that night is indescribable. We will spare you further stories of the atrocities committed.

But the Judge of heaven and earth knows them all. His divine eyes see into the darkest alleyways of France's capital.

DE COLIGNY'S DEATH.

King Charles IX is standing on the balcony of the royal palace. Again and again, he puts his gun to his shoulder.

A shot, a piercing shriek, and in the street below, another person collapses, never to rise again. Like a maniac, the king shoots at his subjects, who, terrified, try to escape.

One of the first to fall at the hands of murderers was the noble De Coligny. When the uproar began, the old man woke with a fright. His wounds from the attempted murder the day before were still fresh. He listens carefully to work out what's happening.

He hears the kicking in of doors.

He hears the screaming of terrified people.



'They fling him through an open window.'
<https://en.wikipedia.org/>

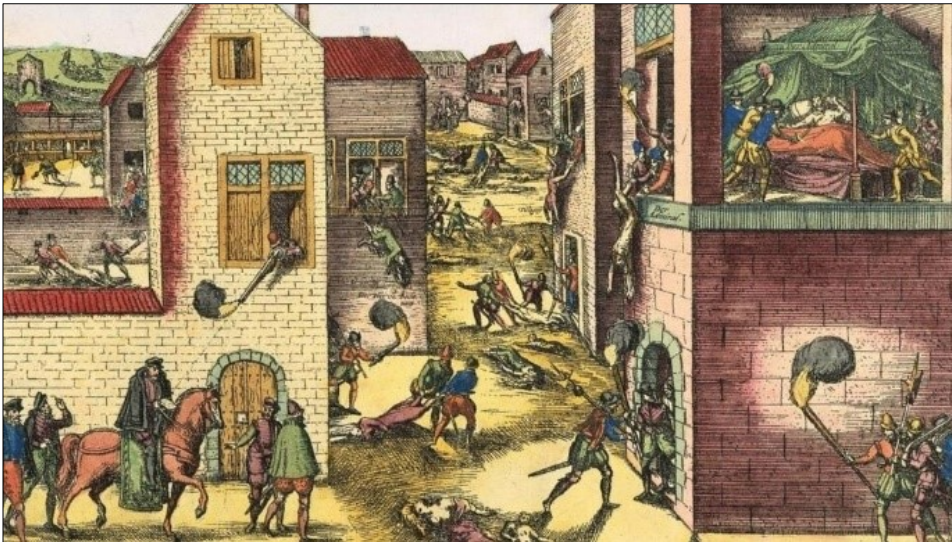
He immediately realises what is going on. "Friends," he says calmly to the horrified people who rush into his room, "friends, flee now! I cannot flee, and I am prepared to die. I commend myself to God's mercy."

A few manage to escape, but most are overtaken by the murderers and killed. Meanwhile, De Coligny's enemies storm into his room. A youth, sword in hand, approaches his bed.

"Are you De Coligny?" he asks the grey-haired one.

"That I am," De Coligny calmly answers, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Young man, have respect for these grey hairs."



This popular print by Frans Hogenberg shows the attempted assassination of Coligny at left, his subsequent murder at right, and scenes of the general massacre in the streets. Wikipedia

In response, the young man thrusts him through with his sword. Then they fling him through the open window, and he plunges down to the street below, landing right in front of his mortal enemy Henry the Guisse, who is sitting on his horse. Henry was waiting in the street for his men to murder De Coligny. He'd led his men to the house and commanded them to throw the Huguenot leader's body out of the window. He wanted to see with his own eyes that his arch-heretic was dead. His wish is fulfilled. There lies his enemy, dead and mutilated. And yet his unbridled hatred has not diminished. Viciously, he makes his horse trample on the body of de Coligny. Then the corpse is dragged through the streets and finally hung on a gallows. De Coligny's weapons are tied to the tails of the horses and dragged along as well. Later they demolish De Coligny's castle and turn the gardens into a wilderness.

The killing continues for days. The lust for murder spreads from Paris throughout all of France. How many Huguenots did they kill? God alone knows the exact number. Some writers estimate the number of dead to be more than 100.000. Others believe it to be no more than 25.000. One day the books will be opened, and the truth of this horrific event will be revealed.

CATHERINE DE MEDICI LIES TO HER SON

We just wrote that the king stood shooting at the fleeing Huguenots like a maniac. Perhaps you ask:

"How is that possible? He was a friend of De Coligny, wasn't he?" True, for a while, his friendship with De Coligny was genuine. But this friendship was a thorn in the eye of his mother. With increasing frustration, that wicked woman saw the growing friendship between the two. If this continued, it would jeopardise her diabolical plan! That's why she had hired someone to murder De

Coligny and so pull her son away from his influence.

But that murderous assault had failed. She decided not to wait any longer but to act before it became too dangerous for her. She made Charles IX believe that De Coligny was planning to kill him and overthrow the government. She slandered the noble De Coligny in the most despicable manner. She wanted the king to become suspicious! At first, Charles IX refused to listen to her. However, she forced him to believe her. His mother accused him of being a coward. Finally, he gave in and gave his approval. "But," he said, "not only the leaders must die, but all the Huguenots must be exterminated to prevent anyone condemning me later."

Catherine De' Medici had triumphed!

Now we understand why the king was shooting at his innocent, defenceless subjects. He had decided to join the murder frenzy.

Terrible!

The Roman Catholic's lust for murder even raged within the royal palace. They killed all the Huguenot nobles who were still feasting. They only spared Henry of Navarre, the bridegroom, and the king's cousin. Both had to promise that they would become Roman Catholic!

This terrible night is known as the

- *St. Bartholomew's Night* or
- *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew Day* or
- *The Bloody Wedding*.

France has raised a pillar of shame for itself with this thousandfold, yes, ten-thousand-fold murder. This can *never* be rectified!

ROME'S RESPONSE

A messenger hurries to Rome, to the pope. He may bring the "joyful" news to the "Holy Father" of all that has happened in Paris and throughout France.

Does the pope become angry?

Does he send him away indignantly?

Does he shudder at the thought of so much innocent bloodshed?

Does he condemn this massacre in the strongest of terms?

We would expect this, wouldn't we?

But no! The opposite is true!

A cardinal gave that messenger a thousand crowns as a reward for his 'wonderful' message!

They fired celebratory cannon shots from the papal palace to express their joy!

Church bells tolled everywhere as if it was a feast day.

They lit large bonfires throughout Rome.

The pope, with other clergymen, went in solemn procession to the church to 'thank' God and sing a hymn of praise.

Did heaven celebrate as well?

In memory of this 'happy event', they minted a commemorative coin in Rome to make sure that nobody would forget it. One side of the coin showed the pope's likeness; the other showed a destroying angel descending on the Huguenots.



'they minted a commemorative coin in Rome to make sure that nobody would forget it.' <http://libertymagazine.org/>

Around the edge, they wrote "The Slaughter of the Huguenots".

The pope had the audacity to have murals painted in his palace.

What did they show?

Jesus weeping for Jerusalem?

Oh no, they showed the killing of defenceless Huguenot women and children!

Appalling!

And that man dared to call himself the vicar of Christ! *He* would rule the Church of Christ on earth?! The 'Holy Father' also wrote a letter to the French king, Charles IX.

Do you know what he wrote?

Just read it:

"Continue bravely on the path you have chosen, and do not lose the outcome you have won by using such strong medicine by showing any leniency."

This was his papal approval.

The pope called this a medicine.

Rome uses strange medicines!

The pope encourages the French king to show no leniency at all and apply the same 'medicine' to all the remaining Huguenots.

All this clearly shows that Rome celebrated.

Charles IX also received letters of congratulation from other Roman Catholic countries.

When the news reached Spain, its capital Madrid celebrated too!

The Spanish king, Philip II, also wrote a letter to Charles IX. He wrote that this was the most fantastic and wonderful news he had ever heard. The letter says: "I kiss your hand in gratitude", and a little further, he encourages Charles to:

"Continue in this way and cleanse your kingdom of the plague of heresy."

Do you see how the Roman Catholic Church took delight in this shameful massacre?

Today Rome denies any blame, but *history* speaks another language, an unequivocal language.

There were other voices too.

The emperor of Germany called it a despicable act.

In England, the royal court dressed in black as a sign of mourning.

More countries strongly condemned the massacre.

The military assistance for the Dutch against Spain, which De Coligny and King Charles IX had planned, didn't go ahead either. That was a bitter disappointment for the Dutch. They had already counted on it and planned accordingly.

QUESTIONS

1. What is a reconciliation wedding? Who was to be married?
2. Why was Pope Pius V satisfied with the report of the papal ambassador?
3. Why did the thought of the proposed marriage sadden Jeanne d' Albret?
4. Describe the relationship between Charles IX and De Coligny.
5. Why did the king promise to assist the Netherlands?
6. How did Catherine carry out her private plans before the night of August 23?
7. Did Charles IX seem to go along with his mother's plans? Explain.
8. Describe the events of the night of August 23, 1572.
9. How did De Coligny die?
10. Why did Charles IX join in the murder of his subjects?
11. How did the pope react to the massacre?
12. How did Philip II of Spain respond?
13. How did the emperor of Germany and the royal court in England respond?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How might Catherine have defended her behaviour to the Protestants?
2. How do you view the sudden change of Charles IX? Do you think that he was deceitful or sincere during the time of his friendship with De Coligny?
3. Quote two verses of Psalm 118, which the Huguenots (especially their leader De Coligny) should have paid close attention to after the peace agreement of St. Germain.