

ELIE BENOIST, HISTORIAN OF THE EDICT OF NANTES

by Charles F. Johnston

The revocation in 1685 by Louis XIV of the Edict of Nantes resulted in the immediate exile of all ministers of the Reformed Church, not amenable to conversion, the illegal flight of several hundred thousand of their fellow-believers to neighbouring Protestant lands, and the nominal conversion under duress of the rest to the Roman Catholic Church. It also precipitated a literary polemic in which Protestant writers protested vigorously the injustice of revoking an "irrevocable" edict, and the cruel and oppressive measures preceding and accompanying it, while Roman Catholic counterparts asserted that on the contrary the Edict had been a temporary expedient to end civil strife, extorted forcibly by a naturally rebellious and turbulent minority.

This issue was indeed the culmination of a controversy of long standing. In a recent book Elizabeth Israels Perry has pointed out that after more than a century in which the Protestant-Catholic polemic had focussed upon disputed points of doctrine the arena of battle had shifted. Between 1671 and 1691 history replaced theology as the focus of debate in France: Perry has examined more than a hundred books and pamphlets comprising this literature which appeared in those two decades. It includes works by Nicole, Claude, Maimbourg, Bayle, Varillas, Jurieu, Bossuet, and Ancillon.¹

It was in response to the Revocation and the questions it aroused that Elie Benoist, former minister of Alençon, at the time Refugee minister of the Walloon Church in Delft, undertook the task of writing a history of the Edict of Nantes itself: out of what circumstances it arose, how it was obtained, what its terms were and under what guarantees, how and in what degree it was implemented, how it was circumvented, undermined, eroded, and finally annihilated. From 1687 to 1695 Benoist was heavily engaged in this demanding project, the fruit of which was the publication between 1693 and 1695 of five massive folio volumes entitled History of the Edict of Nantes.²

To this undertaking Benoist brought the advantages of a solid education, a capacity for meticulous detail and painstaking research, honesty and integrity in the use of his sources, and a desire to be fair while at the same time ardently seeking to vindicate his people. If being existentially involved, by physical presence or imagination, in the events which they interpret is essential for good historians, as affirmed by authorities as widely separated in time as Michel de Montaigne and Paul Tillich, then Elie Benoist was pre-eminently qualified, since his long life spans the reign of the King, and he was an eye-witness of the twenty years of repression that reached a climax in 1685. To this experience we shall first turn.

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Benoist was born January 10th, 1640, to parents of modest means, his father being a caretaker for the Paris estate of the Duchess de Trémouille. Both her husband's

family and her own — she was a daughter of Marshall de Bouillon — had in a previous generation represented outstanding Protestant leadership, but — significantly — the Duke had not long before been converted. Young Elie was privileged to share in the instruction supplied by a tutor and in the Reformed worship held in the Duchess's household.³

Recognizing their son's superior intellectual gifts his parents did their best to provide him with further educational opportunities. He did well at first, successfully resisting the efforts of his teachers to convert him; then came a period of rebellion, climaxed by the squandering of the small legacy left him at the death of both his father and mother. Eventually he found what he had been searching for, through the study of theology in the Huguenot College of Montauban. His sojourn there happened to coincide with an incident typical of the time, and which he was later to describe vividly in his History. The trouble began over a trifle: the Jesuits, to whom by a previous order one half of this Protestant building had had to be turned over, asked permission to erect a stage which by mistake or by design blocked one of the entrances used by the Huguenot students. With the rashness of youth the latter tore down the stage, and when some of the culprits were imprisoned their comrades released them. At the complaint of the Jesuits this insult was used as the grounds for turning over to them the Reformed half of the College as well. Huguenot staff and students were transferred to Puylaurens, some distance off.

Thus it was from Puylaurens that Benoist graduated in 1664, and within a year was called to be one of the two (later three) ministers of Alençon. There for the next two decades he would serve, under the necessity of employing all the gravity, tact, firmness that natural endowment, training and experience could bring to his aid. The original Temple of the Reformed Church in the downtown area had been ordered demolished the year before. Its successor was built on rising ground just outside the city. Paul Pascal describes it with some precision:

[The Temple] of Charenton was taken as a model. First a large wall of enclosure pierced by a carriage entrance with two gates, and by a small door at the side. Isolated from all sides, between the courtyard and the garden, rose the Temple building and a house joined to it containing the vestry, the consistory-room, and the caretaker's residence. The Temple was a rectangle measuring within 84 feet in length by 62 in width . . . and able to contain about 1500 persons. It was walled with clapboards, and its roofing [was] of tiles, surmounted by a weather-cock, symbol of vigilance and emblem of the Nation. Entrance to the interior was by three large doors with entrance-halls. Sixteen windows provided light, eight on each side, four above and four below. It was furnished with 59 benches, each seating from 12 to 20, and quite a number of stools, with a lectern covered in green serge for the reader, and with a large pulpit. The Commandments of God in letters of gold on a background of blue canvas were to be seen in a large gilt frame.⁴

This then was to be the scene of Benoist's ministry. He married a young widow shortly after, related to one of the leading families — unhappily, as it turned out. Chauffepié has preserved a sentence in Latin from a vanished autobiography, in which with a frankness suggesting that the matter was common knowledge Benoist states: "He took a wife . . . enveloped with all the faults which can be serious for a peace-loving husband: miserly, rash, quarrelsome, undependable and changeable, with a tireless love of argument, for forty-seven years she made her husband miserable in every terrible way."⁵ Of four children, two daughters survived to maturity.

It is an indication of the state of siege under which the ministers laboured that in 1676 one of Benoist's colleagues, la Conseillère, was silenced and sent to Nantes for six months for having said in a sermon in the hearing of a Capuchin friar that when Kings commanded something against the service of God, it was necessary to remember the apostolic maxim, "We ought to obey God rather than men."⁶

A friendship developed between Benoist and the local Intendant, Barrillon de Morangis, which was to stand the Minister and the Church in good stead for a time at least. Father de la Rue, professor of rhetoric and humanities at the Jesuit college in the city, who engaged Benoist in controversy on a number of occasions, and once accused him of lèse-majesté in attacking the King's religion, found no support from the Intendant.

Severer tests were to come. On June 17th, 1681, a Royal Declaration decreed that children of seven years and older might be converted to the Roman Catholic faith. In practice this meant that if children could be induced to make the sign of the cross or repeat a "Hail, Mary", they could legally be taken from their parents. The response of the Reformed was in horror and foreboding to hold special fast-days and services. Thus, after three weeks' preparation, on August 10th in that year, three successive services were held in the Temple of Alençon. Father de la Rue, Benoist's old adversary, announced that he would be present at the third of these services when Benoist would be preaching. Although the priest did not do so, the expectation of a confrontation drew a large crowd of seven or eight hundred Catholics who gathered in the courtyard outside. Meanwhile the piety of the Huguenots had outlasted the patience of the official informers. The officers of justice, and the clergy, who had been present at the first two services, reluctant to remain another three hours, took their departure, without being successful (despite the pleas of the Elders) in dispersing the noisy mob outside. "Those who remained committed a thousand insolent acts while the Minister was preaching. Some mimicked the preacher; others sang at the top of their voices; still others, carried on the shoulders of their comrades, climbed up on the windows, where they troubled the whole congregation by their grimaces, their poses, their insolent words."

The riot which followed can perhaps best be described in the words of the "Preacher" himself:

Those who were within the enclosure seized the gates and opened to those who were outside. The greatest firebrands jumped over the wall; and all together surged into the Temple, at the very moment when the kneeling Congregation was bringing the devotions of the day to a close with prayer. When someone tried to snatch off the hat of one of these wicked men who refused to uncover, the rascal seized him by the throat; and at once, everyone throwing himself upon his neighbour, they began to fight one another in the Temple itself. There were at the very most among the Congregation about a hundred men each with a cane in his hand, which they had taken more for the sake of appearances, than to defend themselves from insult. Nevertheless, when they stood up at the noise, raising their canes, fear seized the Catholics and they took to their heels as though pursued by a host of enemies. This was not easy for them, because their own men rushing in at the noise blocked their way, and for a long time sealed the exits. But at the same time some began to throw stones and clubs through the windows; and a stone falling on those who had not left their places, and drawing blood, all these people, and especially the women, thought they were going to be massacred without mercy. One clung about the neck of her husband or brother, to prevent him from exposing himself to the fury of the multitude; another hid under the benches to escape being hit by the stones; another threw herself to her knees and clasped her hands, as if to await in an attitude of devotion the stroke of an imminent death; another rushed to the aid of her fainting daughter or neighbour; most people were running from one end of the Temple to the other . . . ; all together were making a clamour that had something frightful about it, by reason of the cries, the tumult, the effects of distress and terror.

Nevertheless, the counter-panic, caused by the gentlemen with the canes, spread so rapidly that the crowd of more than four hundred fled back into the city, to broadcast the alarm that the "Huguenots" were massacring all the Catholics! The local Seigneur, the King's niece, the bigotted Duchess de Guise, vowed vengeance. In this crisis, Benoist frankly admits, "it is certain that the wisdom and moderation of the Intendant saved both the Reformed and the Temple." He himself came in his carriage to conduct the weary worshippers home in safety. Later, after the witnesses for both sides had been heard, he sent an extremely restrained and fair account of all that had happened to the Court.

Thus in a time when in place after place Temples were being closed or demolished on the flimsiest of pretexts, and the inhabitants denied all public worship, the Church of Alençon which had dared openly to resist suffered in this instance only a two hundred pound fine for a member of the congregation who became a scapegoat, and — a more serious loss — the exile of one of its ministers, again la Conseillère, accused of comparing the Declaration affecting the children to Herod's massacre of the innocents. La Conseillère went to Hamburg.

There are extant in the French National Archives documents which exactly confirm Benoist's account, one among many instances in which his scrupulous honesty

and veracity have been verified by later documentary discoveries. We have for example the official complaint of the Reformed Congregation, signed by the ministers and forwarded by the Intendant. There is the 22-leaf summary of evidence from the 40 witnesses from the congregation; there is the accused minister's statement, a hostile counter-statement, and a letter from the Intendant in accord with Benoist's portrait of him:

. . . The information will acquaint you in detail with what happened; but as the proceedings embittered spirits and condemnations might take away what union and inter-relation remain, which seem to me most necessary for the service of the King, and for the peace of his peoples, I believe that it is more expedient to hush this matter up than to investigate it further. Nevertheless I do not think that it is possible to pass over in silence what the minister la Conseillère set forth in his preaching the day of the uproar, all the more that he has already fallen into an offense quite similar, as it will appear to you by the decree I am sending you. He is a man of bold spirit, and far removed from the moderation which appears in the addresses of the two other ministers who are here.⁸

Also in the National Archives is to be found the official report of the visit of a delegation composed of the Intendant Jubert de Bouville, Morangis's successor, and three ecclesiastics, to the Consistory at Alençon, on July 4th, 1683. The occasion, paralleled in every Reformed Church in France, was the reading by royal command of the "Avertissement Pastoral" or Pastoral Admonition issued by the Assembly of Clergy. It took the form of a fraternal appeal to the Reformed to end the schism and return to the Church — but with a sting in its tail, since it ended with the warning that if this plea went unheeded, then, "because this last error will be more criminal in you than all the rest, you must expect troubles incomparably more horrible and more disastrous than those which your revolt and schism have brought you to this present time."⁹

The fatal blow fell on Alençon's Reformed congregation in the Fall of 1684. On August 21st a royal declaration ordered that at the first summons the registers and accounts of the consistories should be surrendered to the directors of the hospitals, in order to make sure that all legacies and funds donated for charitable purposes had been turned over to them, as a previous declaration of January 15th, 1683 had commanded. The Consistory of Alençon was accordingly summoned to present its records for examination on October 3rd: Benoist and Boullay an elder were delegated to represent it.

They tried evasive tactics in vain, being obliged eventually to produce four such books, including a register covering the years 1656 to 1680 in which about one hundred and twenty entries proved to have been obliterated by what the authorities declared to be "fresh ink". It appears that Benoist was largely responsible,

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and the deputies justified the action on the ground that these particular entries contained references to the private lives of individual members brought before the Consistory for moral lapses, and hence not properly open to public scrutiny. There had been other account books, but the two deputies stated that these had been burnt three years before. Upon this they were declared liable for the prescribed penalty, the Church was condemned to a fine of five hundred pounds applicable to the hospital, and public worship in Alençon was provisionally forbidden until such time as they could produce the missing accounts.¹⁰

Not long after this, prosecution began against Benoist himself. Since his presence in Alençon was dangerous for him and for others he went into hiding in Paris, and was there at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, October 18th, 1685. Under the order obtained against him by the Duchess de Guise his goods had already been seized and he was liable to arrest. The royal command that all ministers should leave France within fifteen days, on pain of galley-slavery, took precedence, however, and he was able to obtain a passport for himself and his wife, though having perforce to leave his daughters behind.

The haven of refuge in this case was to be the Netherlands. Only 45 years old at the time of his exile, Benoist was soon to find a congenial sphere of work as third minister of the Walloon congregation in the city of Delft, which worshipped then as now in the ancient chapel adjacent to the Prinsenhof. It was to be a ministry there extending over thirty years, followed by thirteen years of what appeared at times to his successor to be irritatingly active retirement!

In taking up his new duties in Delft Benoist did not simply divest himself of the old ones. One of his earliest published works is a letter written to his former parishioners in Alençon, many of whom had succumbed to the violence of the dragons ^{to be} billeted in their homes. The letter exhorted those who had denied their faith to recover their courage and cease their hypocrisy.¹¹ As events proved, his confidence in them was soon to be vindicated: resistance grew, no less than eight of the elders were imprisoned; many of the Protestants of Alençon withdrew to foreign lands, a number of them finding their way to Delft publicly to repent their abjuration and to be received back into communion. Among the latter were Benoist's daughters.¹²

It was a period of intense activity: defending publicly the retreat of the pastors into exile, against those who charged them with cowardice and desertion;¹³ at the same time working with a group on a secret project to send ministers back to France disguised as peasants, to areas where they were not known, in order to provide support and leadership to their persecuted people. About one hundred and ten exiled pastors were ready to undertake the dangerous mission. One of the group's members turned out to be a collaborator in the pay of the French government, the plans were betrayed, and the disguised ministers arrested on arrival in France.¹⁴

It was not only the pastors, however, who needed defending against misrepresentation at this time. Authorities in France, sensitive to the bad publicity occasioned by the flight of tens of thousands of refugees, were encouraging the circulation of stories of the rebelliousness and disloyalty of the Reformed subjects of the King, despite the latter's "kindly" treatment of them. And so the moment had arrived for their vindication, that those who had taken all else from them might not be allowed to take away their good name as well. This was the incentive for the writing of Benoist's major work and the one for which he is primarily known, his History of the Edict of Nantes.

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The trail was blazed by two works with the identical aim, although far less comprehensive in scope. The first of these, justly famous for its clarity and eloquent directness, with the dimensions of a pocket-book, was The Complaints of the Protestants cruelly oppressed in the Kingdom of France by Jean Claude, exiled minister of the Paris congregation of Charenton, who had taken refuge in The Hague.¹⁵ Written only a few months after the Revocation, the little book is a poignant cry for understanding and for justice. Claude undertakes to show how the very loyalty of the Reformed during the disturbances of the "Fronde" in the King's youth was turned to their hurt by their enemies who poisoned the King's mind against them, such that the resolution was formed to destroy them.

The means adopted Claude analyzes as six "ways of persecution". First, the perversion of justice in the courts of the realm, to enable the despoiling both of Reformed communities and individuals. The second was the gradual loss by orders-in-Council of all the civil rights guaranteed by the Edict of Nantes, including those of holding office, and entering professions or trades. The third was the discovery of ingenious possibilities of circumventing the Edict through ambiguities in its wording, and books were written by Meynier, Bernard, and Fillau, for the express purpose of showing how this could be done. The fourth way of persecution was a multitude of restrictive regulations of all sorts, designed to inhibit contact and mutual support, and to expose the young and the elderly to conversion pressures. Claude saw as the fifth way the deliberate creating of the illusion that however far the authorities might go in restricting Protestant rights, they would stop short of actual proscription. The sixth and last way was the encouragement of the people to hate and despise the Reformed, enlisting the aid of writers like Arnaud, Soulier, and Nicole.

So at length comes the climax in the "dragonnades" and the Revocation: harrowing examples of the torments suffered are provided, as recounted by the refugees streaming into Protestant lands at that very moment. There follow Claude's reflections

upon the tragic consequences of these events. It has profaned the dignity of the King, who has been persuaded to break his own pledged word. It has done great harm to the nation itself through the loss of a population active in industry and trade, including many persons distinguished in gifts and skills, and through loss of public confidence in the integrity of the state. It has injured the relations of France with its neighbours. Not least it has dishonoured the Pope and the Catholic clergy through what has been identified as the result of their pressure on the French government. With a vigorous and moving protest against the harm done, and the sufferings cruelly and unjustly inflicted upon his compatriots, Claude lets the defence rest.

Benoist was to describe his History of the Edict of Nantes later as "only properly an extension of these Complaints [of Claude], accompanied by factual proofs and a large number of examples."¹⁶

Two years later, in 1688, there appeared an anonymous work, in due course identified as that of Gaultier de Saint-Blancard, entitled History and Apologia, a Defence of the Liberties of the Reformed Churches of France.¹⁷ The author was a former minister of Montpellier, now court chaplain in Berlin. As in the case of Claude, his aim was to vindicate the Reformed against the misrepresentations current, and notably the book of a converted minister, David-Augustin Brueys, Reply to the Complaints of the Protestants, in which Brueys interpreted the Edict of Nantes as a provisional and temporary measure, and denied that the coercive actions taken in the case of the Reformed could be described as persecution, but simply as the paternal correction undertaken by the King to bring rebellious and schismatic subjects to a right mind.¹⁸

In the first section of his three-part work therefore Saint-Blancard sets out to demonstrate that the Edict of Nantes, being a genuine treaty between the King of France and his subjects, was indeed "perpetual and irrevocable", and could not properly be abrogated unilaterally by royal authority without the breaking of faith.¹⁹ Then comes a survey of the history of the persecutions during the twenty-five years preceding the Revocation, grouped in the manner of Claude under twelve categories, the history of each being examined in turn. The third section describes the suffering and disastrous consequences of the Revocation. The final volume contained a collection of documents supporting the author's claims.

Already there was taking shape in Benoist's mind the project of a much more comprehensive historical vindication, despite his sense of inadequacy for the task. In the General Preface to his History he was later to say, "What confirmed me the more in this feeling is that other persons having worked on the same subject a short time before I set myself to the task, I found in their Writings too much apologia, and too

little history; although I discovered in them much that was sound. Now it is precisely this that seemed to me quite indispensable, in describing what happened for and against the Reformed, namely to give in sufficient length the facts which concern them; in order that it may be easier in considering them from every aspect to judge whether they are the marks of a factious, libertine, & restless spirit."²⁰

Such was the genesis of the History of the Edict of Nantes, requiring eight years for its completion, a work of five large volumes, in quarto, beautifully bound in leather, and clearly and accurately printed. The initial two volumes were published in 1693, the first of which describes in comparatively brief compass the antecedents of the Edict of Nantes, and the circumstances of its granting and enforcement, until the assassination of Henry IV in 1610, and the second of which carries on the story in laborious detail until the death of Louis XIII in 1643. The third part in three more volumes of equal girth appeared in 1695, of which the third volume covered the period from 1643 to 1665, the fourth that from 1665 to 1683, and the fifth that from 1683 to 1687, describing the events immediately preceding the Revocation, and its consequences during the two following years. The work includes a dedicatory epistle, a general preface and a preface for each of the three parts, three lists of the principal sources, extensive topical indexes, and is moreover buttressed by no less than four hundred separate documents in small print at the end of Volumes I, II, III, and V, and indexed in their turn.

Now it is quite obvious that an undertaking of such dimensions, involving extensive research, was beyond the modest means of a refugee minister. But William of Orange, soon to be King of Great Britain, was prepared to encourage such writings, as he had already that of Claude, in order to focus European indignation against the aggressive policies of France. Accordingly the Estates of Holland in November, 1687, voted Benoist a pension of 315 guilders "to write a history of the religious persecution in France", and in 1695 voted him a like sum upon its completion.

It may be of some interest to spend a little while examining the sources used by this 17th century historian. Among the one hundred and thirty-eight items listed in his bibliography there are, as one might expect, works of general history,²¹ mémoires and journals in profusion, letters and biographies. There are the Mercure Français, and the Mercurio of Vittorio Siri. There are the minutes of National Synods, Provincial Synods, Colloquies, and their political counterparts, General Assemblies and Provincial Assemblies; and along with them those of the Assemblies of the Clergy of the Catholic Church. There are the works of Filleau and Bernard, showing how the Edict of Nantes was open to restrictive interpretation; and the highly critical polemics of Meynier and Soulier, together with the Protestant response. There are a number of collections of royal declarations, decrees of the Council and of individual

Parlements, judgments, sentences, records of criminal proceedings involving ministers and consistories, and of cases concerning the right of public worship.

In 1689 Benoist fell heir to a valuable collection of documents. They had been accumulated through a number of years by Abraham Tessereau, Sieur de Bernay, an elder of the Paris congregation of Charenton, who had been Secretary of His Majesty from 1653 to 1673. He was the author of a carefully researched history of the French chancery, and of a history of the Reformed congregation of La Rochelle. Although some of the documents which he had assembled with a view to writing a more general history were lost on the way to the Netherlands where Tessereau died in 1689, Benoist found among the remainder materials otherwise inaccessible.²²

Benoist expresses regret that there are unavoidable gaps in the documentation: consistorial records, deeds, and titles, had to be surrendered to the authorities to justify the right of public worship when this was challenged, and they were usually not returned; moreover, the manuscripts in the Royal Library, and in the Library of the Sorbonne, were not available, nor could he find anyone who would dare to make extracts from them for his purpose. He had tried in some measure to compensate for this by carefully collecting such extracts as appeared in the mémoires he used, and in printed works. For the rest, he says, "it seemed to me more appropriate to be brief on certain subjects than to make up for the lack of Titles & Mémoires by the boldness of my conjectures."²³

It is evident that he was thorough and indefatigable in his research. There is extant a letter of Benoist's addressed to a colleague in Berlin, from which the following passage is taken:

. . . I shall reiterate, Monsieur, [my] most humble thanks . . . for the trouble you have kindly taken to draw up such exact and useful Mémoires, from which I have already profited, and hope to benefit still more. It all reached me in good condition. The Mémoires are contained in a book of 120 pages, very appropriately bound and covered with camleted paper [marbré], and the letter was inside, very ample, very obliging, and very instructive. I could have wished indeed that you had added the Catalogue of printed Mémoires with which you are acquainted, and which you might have considered of possible service to me. It may be that you know some one which the others did not bring to my attention. Diverse persons have pointed out to me the work of M. de Belloi which you mention; but I have not yet been able to find anyone who could lend it to me or tell me where I might find it. It is the same with the work of Father Meynier printed in Béziers, and different from the one in which he deals with the Six Truths. I wanted to have them sent from France; but instead of what I asked for they sent me at great expense some absolutely useless books. It would be of no little help to communicate to me either the works themselves, or judicious extracts such as an intelligent man might make. For the rest, Monsieur, I shall make use of the Mémoires which you had the kindness to send me with the discretion you desire, and you will not be named . . .²⁴

More than a century ago there also turned up a printed brochure or circular from an historian, requesting materials "concerning the reformed religion and the freedom of its practice" during the reigns of Henry IV, Louis XIII, and "under the present reign". It is addressed to the victims of the Revocation in France and abroad. In form it is very complete and thorough. There are four categories of information sought for the reign of Henry IV relating to the securing of the Edict of Nantes, public opposition and resistance, the implementation, and the resulting effects. For the reign of Louis XIII materials are sought concerning both the confirmations of and infractions to the Edict, the related wars and civil strife, the measures planned or undertaken against the Reformed. Then no less than thirty-six categories of materials for the period from 1643 to 1685, followed by sixteen more from 1685 to the moment of writing. There are more exhortations to provide all that could be useful, now and also later if further matters of interest come to light. The packages are to be sent to ——— but the name and address have unfortunately been left blank!

The 19th century editor of this interesting document was inclined to date it, on the basis of internal evidence, around 1690 or possibly 1700; he thought that its author was himself a refugee; he characterized the spelling as that of writings printed in Holland towards the end of the 17th century. He suggested the names of five persons with whom it might have originated: Elie Benoist, Saint-Blancard, Claude Brousson, Abraham Tessereau, Charles Ancillon.

The author of this paper finds the attribution to Benoist by far the most plausible, for these reasons: the fact that the document appears to come from Holland, and from a refugee; the fact that it is so thorough, that it covers precisely the period dealt with in Benoist's History, that in the materials asked for it focusses explicitly on the Edict, its winning, implementation and undermining; the fact that its categories cover precisely the matters dealt with in Benoist's work, and in exhaustive detail. There are other points of contact: for example, the intention of the brochure's author to deal with the material chronologically — and this is Benoist's general scheme, dealing with a year at a time, rather than as with Claude and Saint-Blancard surveying a particular form of persecution over an entire span of twenty-five years; again, the circular asks for information about "the prestige, the number and the quality of the nobility in the [Reformed] party", whereas Benoist justifies in his General Preface the attention given to the nobility on the ground that "they are everywhere to be found, & one cannot speak of the Churches without having occasion to to speak of these distinguished persons, who either strengthened them by their protection, or ruined them by their squabbling,"²⁶ Further, we have mentioned already Benoist's criticism of his predecessors, that in what they had written there was too

much apologia and too little history — writes the author of the circular:

[Those who read this] are asked just as much to communicate what seems reprehensible on the part of the Reformed, if they know something of that sort, as what seems advantageous to them, respecting all that is listed above: [for example] conspiracy, disloyalty, rash enterprises, such as the circumstances of case, capture, trial and execution of Marcilly, and all things of the same nature, in order not to be open to criticism by those who would take offence at such omissions, etc.²⁷

The unknown author of the brochure also uses a similar vocabulary, and notably a phrase found now and then in Benoist's History, a reference to "la cause commune", the "common cause" of the Reformed in their union as a people.²⁸

If then, as seems likely, the anonymous circular issued from Benoist, it would reinforce the impression of careful and painstaking research that his work itself conveys.

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Benoist's way, then, of vindicating his people against the cruel misrepresentations then current was to focus attention upon their charter, the Edict of Nantes: the circumstances in which it was granted, the nature of the rights it was meant to secure and the safeguards it contained, the manner and degree of its implementation, the anxiety produced by early attacks upon it and the divisive and abortive attempts to defend it, the means devised to undermine its provisions, the accelerating pace of erosion leading to complete overthrow in the act of revocation.

What sort of document was this Edict of April, 1598, which becomes at once the hero and the villain of the tale that is to follow? It was curiously complex, strictly speaking not one document but five: the Edict proper consisted of 92 articles; in addition, there were 56 secret articles, and three letters-patent, and these various components were not necessarily regarded as having equal weight. Indeed ambiguities abounded, making it notoriously vulnerable to malevolent interpretation later. In brief résumé its terms contained these essential points:

1. Worship: the right of private worship everywhere; the right of public worship wherever it had been authorized by a previous Edict in 1577, and wherever publicly carried on in 1596 and 1597, with the grant of an additional place in each bailiwick and senechaussée. Included was the right of each higher noble to have worship on his estate, the lesser gentry being limited to the attendance of 30 persons not part of the family.

2. Finances: The King would provide a subsidy for the payment of ministers, in return for which the Reformed would continue to pay tithes. The secret articles permitted the receiving of legacies by Churches, and the raising of money from the people.

3. Education: The Reformed were to be permitted to teach in and attend Universities and Colleges, and have their own Colleges and Schools if they so desired.

4. Offices: They were to be admitted on equal terms with Catholics to all offices, and to be eligible to enter trades and professions.

5. Property: They were granted all property and succession rights.

6. Justice: The so-called Chamber of the Edict, with minimal Protestant representation, was maintained in Paris, and similar Chambers set up in two other places; Bipartite Chambers (6 Protestants, 6 Catholics) were to function in four places in areas with larger Protestant populations. All of these courts were for referral of cases involving the Reformed.

7. Security: all the military strongholds then being held by the Reformed were to remain in their hands for a period of eight years, the Protestant garrisons to be paid by the King, except in the case of fortresses belonging directly to individual nobles. Benoist believed that only about 100 all told were capable of being seriously defended.²⁹

It is difficult in an essay of this scope to convey the flavour of Benoist's work. It does not read like a novel! Its force is deliberately intended to rest on the cumulative weight of literally hundreds of individual cases involving Reformed persons, churches, or institutions, in which justice was done or subverted, and in which the provisions of the Edict were maintained or weakened. Petitions sent to the King from time to time, often having to do with specific grievances, are carefully analyzed for the light which they shed; so are important books of controversy from both the Catholic and the Protestant side. It is important for Benoist to trace the local origin of some particular infraction, in a given community or province, by which a precedent is set for a more general decree of the Council of France, or in turn for a Royal Declaration making it the law of the land.³⁰

Let us limit ourselves by way of overview to the main conclusions which Benoist reaches, and which he endeavours to demonstrate with all the evidence he has mustered. In broad outline they are these:

(1) That the Edict was not extorted by force but given and received in good faith, and as such was intended to be indeed "perpetual and irrevocable". Benoist makes abundantly clear that during the five years of negotiation preceding the granting of it the forces of the Catholic League were still holding out, and that it was only after their commander, the Duke de Mercoeur, had made peace and Henry IV had no further enemy to face that he came to Nantes at the head of his army. There, despite later tales of Huguenot intimidation, their representatives "received the Edict disarmed, & as though reduced to the King's discretion; whereas the King gave it armed, & having the [Reformed] Assembly at Châtelleraud, so to speak, under his guns."³¹

(2) That the actions of Henry IV in its implementation confirmed this intention. Benoist describes the firmness, even sternness, of the King in insisting on its ratification by reluctant Parlements, at the cost to be sure of some significant modifications

in the terms. The Commissaries or Commissioners, one Catholic, one Protestant, sent into each Province acted for the most part with scrupulous observance of those terms, and if they could not agree and the matter was referred to the King, he usually decided for the broader and more favourable interpretation of the Edict's articles. Admittedly, in the interests of securing papal favour he might be prepared to see his friend and confidant du Plessis-Mornay publicly humiliated, but the evidence is strong that he intended the Reformed to have the protection of their Edict as long as they needed it.³²

(3) That Henry IV's assassination gave rise to understandable anxiety, reinforced by the overt hostility of the Regency. Though four times in almost as many years Royal Declarations confirmed the Edict of Nantes, the steady whittling away of its provisions had begun. The Court knew how to manipulate the divisions within the ranks of the Reformed, playing on the fears of some, and the ambitions of others, to frustrate the satisfying of grievances, and to sow suspicion.

(4) That the turbulence of aristocratic factions and feudal resistance to growing centralization contributed to the troubles of the 1620's. Benoist recognizes that Huguenot nobles were often rash, self-centred, power-hungry, and not infrequently sought to use the Reformed as a party to advance their own interests. They had their Catholic counterparts. On the other hand, the King's ministers saw and made him see as his particular mission the reduction of all secondary centres of power, leaving only himself as the source of all authority and might. Some of the more discerning Catholics, says Benoist, recognized the threat: for example, "[they] laboured with regret to take this town [la Rochelle] & clearly foresaw that its ruin would be for all the Kingdom the beginning of slavery: but by a strange curiosity of the human spirit it often happens that it prepares for itself the pitfalls where it will be caught, & forges for itself the chains it will be made to wear."³⁴

(5) That the Reformed were justified in taking up arms, and that this was not to constitute "a state within a state". Benoist asks if there are ever occasions when subjects may legitimately resist their sovereign: his conclusion is

That though to be sure it is always to be desired that people will never take up arms, & though it is even helpful to overdo submission and patience, nevertheless there may be occasions when oppression is so evident, the good of the State so openly attacked, the holiest rights of Justice & Liberty violated with so little restraint, that the defence of the oppressed cannot be regarded as illegitimate, and one cannot fairly blame them for taking up arms for their safety.³⁵

That this was such an occasion Benoist endeavours to show by recording the numerous attacks already made on the Edict, with little or no redress obtained, the angry impatience of the King and his dark suspicion of Reformed Synods and Assemblies,

and especially his invasion of his independent kingdom of Béarn, which had been largely Protestant for sixty years: restoring by force former Catholic property to that Church, and obliging the Protestants to surrender temples, cemeteries, and the main sources of revenue for education and poor relief, as well as half the public offices.³⁶

The Reformed had been put on the defensive, and their very fear had led them to take measures which added to Court hostility. Alongside their ecclesiastical constitution of church courts for discipline, they had long since developed a political constitution going back in its conciliar form to the 1570's, with provincial assemblies and councils, and a general assembly to take counsel for the protection of the "common cause". In the present crisis, when the Court resolved on war against Protestant strongholds, the General Assembly set up a complete military establishment, with eight "Circles" or groups of Provinces, each under a general, and with (at least on paper) special provisions for taxation, for courts, etc. When war came, however, a considerable part of the Reformed community abstained, from loyalty to the King, prudence, or self-interest, or put up only a token resistance.³⁷

(6) That once disarmed the Reformed ceased to constitute any kind of threat to the royal authority, and remained unshakably loyal royalists despite the increasing tempo of restriction and persecution. Benoist lays stress on their important role in the failure of the rebellion known as the "Fronde". The young Louis XIV was indeed fleetingly moved to grateful recognition, re-affirming the Edict in a Royal Declaration of May, 1652, which stated that he was thus inclined, "the more so that our said subjects of the So-called Reformed Religion [la Religion Prétendue Réformée] have given us clear proofs of their affection & fidelity, notably in the present circumstances, with which we are most content."³⁸

The negative side of this royalist sentiment, for Benoist, was a passivity in the face of depredation, and an adulation of the King that verged on idolatry, and encouraged dependence and sycophancy. The fulsome speech of a Protestant consul of Montélimar already in 1622 leads Benoist to comment: "These excessive flatteries are always either the effects or the forewarnings of servitude: & subjects renounce the right to complain that their Sovereign raises his power above Justice, when they raise him above mankind by such praises. That is why we see today that flattery has no limits in places where liberty no longer has any resources."³⁹

(7) That the Roman Catholic clergy of France played the major role in suggesting and pressing for restrictive measures. This for Benoist is particularly obvious during the reign of Louis XIV. The strong protest of the Assembly of the Clergy in 1656 succeeded in having nullified through a new Royal Declaration the concessions that had been made in response to the loyalty of the Reformed during the Fronde. A similar Assembly in 1661 through its spokesman called upon the King to purge the State of a heresy which was

robbing it of the honour of its ancient piety. From the same Assembly went published Mémoires to each diocese, showing how by a proper interpretation of the Edict the privileges of the Reformed might be curtailed: namely, by reading it in the light of all the previous edicts of pacification — as though these had not been superseded — and in the light of all subsequent declarations and decrees.⁴⁰

This was the prelude to a series of books, the authors of which vied with, and learned from, one another concerning the rigorous ways in which the Edict could be interpreted so as to reduce drastically the powers of the Reformed. Such books were written in turn by Filleau, Advocate Royal in Poitiers, in 1661, published at the expense of the clergy in 1668;⁴¹ by the Jesuit Meynier in 1662, 1665, and 1670;⁴² by a lawyer of Béziers, Bernard, in 1664 and 1666.⁴³ Meynier indeed accompanied the Commissioners on their rounds, as a new investigation of titles began in the 1660's. If a particular Church's title was based on its having carried on worship publicly "in 1596 & 1597", Bernard insisted that it must be able to produce documentary proof that worship was continued consecutively throughout both years. Otherwise an evident, unchallenged existence for 60 years carried no weight. By such harsh, not to say unreasonable, demands the Churches of Poitou, for example, had been reduced by 1671 from 61 to 13, and those of Guyenne from 80 to 3.⁴⁴

Benoist finds the clergy demanding the expulsion of the Reformed from trades and crafts, the elimination of the Chambers of the Edict, permission for children to be converted at the age of seven, and denial to all Catholics — and especially "new converts" — of the right to change their religious allegiance: all of these and numerous others before they were in due course enacted into law by Royal Declarations.⁴⁵ Yet the Assembly of the Clergy in 1685, on the eve of the Revocation, could through its spokesman congratulate the King that "it was in winning the hearts of the Heretics that [he] had conquered the obstinacy of their spirit," by his "favours" contended with "their obduracy", so that "they would never perhaps have returned to the bosom of the Church in any other way than by the road strewn with flowers that [he] had opened before them."⁴⁶

(8) That Gallican tendencies in the Roman Catholic Church in France created tensions between the royal government and Rome which were not infrequently a factor in the treatment accorded the Reformed. Benoist has occasion at the very beginning of his History to explain the draconian measures taken against the Protestant "heretics" by Henry II in 1551 in terms of a quarrel involving the King and the Pope, and he comments: "This policy was often followed in France, to persecute the Reformed when there were disagreements with the Pope: & never did they have worse times to pass through than when there were disputes between the Courts of France and of Rome."⁴⁷ We have taken note of another example from the reign of Henry IV. Perhaps the most striking instance

is the "Pastoral Admonition", ordered to be read formally in every Consistory, in order to recall these erring "brothers" to the fold. It appeared precisely at the time when the Pope was incensed over the Gallican Articles which challenged his authority. The Admonition speaks unctuously of the Pope as one "whose life and character . . . make visible to all in our time the most perfect model of complete sanctity." So the Reformed are invited to reconcile themselves "with this holy Pope whose totally reformed life is a living school of all Christian virtues."⁴⁸

Benoist states that Innocent XI, "who was without question one of the greatest men to occupy this See for several centuries, was not taken in by these contortions", and his supporters might well have retorted with the text, "And they said to him, Hail King of the Jews, & struck him with their rods"!

(9) That the treatment of the Reformed, far from being a "road strewn with flowers", was a cruel and ultimately violent persecution. To cover only the last twenty years before the Revocation Benoist gives us in his collection of documents more than two hundred edicts, decrees, and declarations, by means of which by 1685 their Churches, which had numbered some 760 in 1598, had been reduced to 50 or 60; they had lost their Colleges, and most of their Schools; most professions and trades had been closed to them; their chambers or courts had been suppressed; their collective property had been seized, even their cemeteries in places where public worship had been prohibited, and many individuals and families had been ruined by fines or disproportionate taxation or by the billeting of troops.⁴⁹

The latter, always a burdensome exaction, became for the first time in 1681 a systematic campaign of physical violence. Initiated by the Intendant of Poitou, Marillac, the Reformed of that province underwent nine months of torment at the hands of those who were popularly called "booted missionaries", a practice quickly imitated by de Muin in La Rochelle. The result was 33,000 forced conversions, but naval desertions from La Rochelle, and the desolation of Poitou caused by large numbers fleeing the province, temporarily discredited these means. Nevertheless the program was resumed in Béarn in 1685, with such outward success that the royal Council decided to extend it throughout the Kingdom. Before the Edict was revoked nearly ten provinces were being subjected to the barbarities of the so-called "dragonnades", although other troops besides dragoons were given free rein in this enterprise.⁵⁰

(10) That the consequences of the Revocation were disastrous, not only for its victims, but also for the Church of France, and for the Kingdom itself. Benoist tells dramatic and moving tales of the sufferings and trials of those who left all behind to flee the country: concealing themselves in ingenious ways on board ships, or setting out to cross the Channel in small boats; or those who in an infinite variety of disguises attempted to cross a frontier, often through extremely rough terrain. All of them

did so at the risk of life-long galley-slavery for men, and prison for women, if they were caught.⁵¹

Those who had abjured under duress were troubled by remorse, and as soon as the soldiers were sent elsewhere absented themselves from Mass: whereupon they were threatened with renewed violence, and a special place was set apart for them in the Church, their attendance being taken at the door. Those who in illness refused the sacrament were by a new Royal Declaration to be sent to the galleys if they recovered, or their bodies to be dragged through the streets on a hurdle if they did not.⁵²

This kind of forced communion scandalized many devout Catholics, who were also disgusted and horrified by the barbarous treatment of the dead. They foresaw, and Benoist was in full agreement, that so to profane sacred rites can only lead ultimately to irreligion. Benoist was to state this quite explicitly in a manuscript *Mémoire* surviving among his papers: ". . . wise policy requires that each person be allowed the freedom to follow the inclinations of his conscience: because between irreligion and forced Religion there is little difference, and because the constraint which accustoms someone to profess to believe what he does not believe disposes him to believe nothing at all."⁵³ So an age of irreligion was being prepared.

Apart from the hurt to be suffered by the Church through this self-inflicted wound, France itself had suffered a loss in prestige and in credibility. How could its neighbours henceforth put faith in its pledged word to them if a "perpetual and irrevocable" Edict could thus be written off as "provisional"? The actual embarrassment of the Court of France had been manifested alike by its encouragement of defamatory writings about the supposed disloyalty and groundless complaints of the Reformed, by its largely vain attempts to persuade the refugees to return, and by the harsh measures taken to prevent others from escaping. Despite such efforts Benoist declared that about two hundred thousand had already fled from France at the time of publication of his *History*: they included members of the nobility, merchants, artisans, soldiers, sailors, including many officers. If some were destitute, others had found ways of bringing considerable wealth with them or sending it ahead of them, in cash or merchandise. So France, by driving from its midst a skilled, industrious, and loyal population who posed no threat, had wronged and injured itself.⁵⁴

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How have these conclusions fared under the analysis of later historians, permitted greater objectivity because less immediately involved. The answer is, remarkably well. There is substantial agreement on all of these points, with a few notable exceptions.

To be sure, both from the Catholic and the Protestant side important nuances have been added. E. G. Léonard in Le Protestant Français lays particular stress on

Benoist's description of the unrealistic expectations of the imminent triumph of the Protestant cause in France current among the Huguenots at the time of the granting of the Edict, and he goes beyond Benoist's ultimate disillusionment with the Edict by quoting with approval the words of F. Strowski:

The situation henceforth imposed on the Reformed completed their overthrow. The Edict of Nantes closed in upon them like a tomb. Under its encouragement there were established political and social conditions, manners, urbanity, worldliness, a monarchical cult and intellectual tastes which for a second time, and more effectively than the impotent dragonnades would do, killed the soul of Anne du Bourg, the Martyr, and the spirit of Calvin, the Master."⁵⁵

While acknowledging the strength of the leadership provided by both ministers and consistories, Léonard underlines the tendency of the latter "to transform a worship in spirit into a religion of works and prohibitions", and sees the preoccupation of the ministers with catechetical instruction, controversy, and above all preaching — often "didactic, sober, cold, essentially anti-Catholic" — as tending to crowd out a pastoral ministry to personal needs.⁵⁶ Granted the political, economic, and social pressures, working for conversion, and the self-interest involved, to which Benoist rightly points, there is little recognition by him of the genuine appeal of Catholic missionaries skilled in addressing such spiritual hunger, and of a Catholic Church in process of renewal.

With regard to the irrevocability of the Edict, there are differing views. The Catholics believed the Edict provisional, Lavissee declared.⁵⁷ Said Mariéjol: "This progress was the work of circumstances much more than of desires. . . Tolerance had no guarantee but the will of the sovereign: everything was against it, institutions and men." And again, "it is not to be doubted that Henry IV desired, like all men of his time, unity of faith in his kingdom."⁵⁸ But others agree entirely with Benoist: "perpetual and irrevocable", says Viénot,⁵⁹ and Baird insisted that it "could be abrogated only by the united action of all parties concerned."⁶⁰ Léonard qualifies this recognition by noting that it was inevitable that legislation born of particular circumstances would continue to be influenced by changing needs and conditions "despite all its declarations of irrevocability and its green seal, symbol of everlasting charters."⁶¹

Opinions are sharply divided about the justification and the wisdom of the measures taken for self-defence in the years preceding the outbreak of war in 1621. Were they not unnecessarily provocative? Did they not create the impression that the Reformed were ready on whatever pretext to risk civil war?⁶² A number of historians are convinced that putting the General Assembly on a war-footing in 1621 was indeed to set up a "state within a state".⁶³ On the other hand, was it not the disturbing memory of this active resistance, abortive though it proved, that postponed the execution for more than fifty years, and thus won a reprieve, albeit of slow strangulation?⁶⁴

There is division on this point, as also with respect to the related charge of republicanism. Substantial evidence exists to justify Benoist's defence of the loyalty of his people, and for his contention that during these years of the reign of Louis XIV when their ruin was being contrived they "loved their Prince almost to the point of adoration, & carried their homage & their dependency to a degree a little too close to idolatry."⁶⁵ Yet their political constitution was a natural development of their ecclesiastical polity, and that in turn an inherent aspect of their Calvinism. Representative church courts consorted ill with absolute monarchy. Significantly, not only was the government reluctant to allow the meetings of synods, but as far as possible contact with foreign Protestants was prevented. In the instructions to commissioners attending National Synods it was explicitly declared: "The Political State conforming easily to the Ecclesiastical, it is important that those who teach Theology in a Monarchy shall not have been imbued with Democratic or Aristocratic precepts."⁶⁶ The King was reminded publicly in 1680 that the overturning of the altars in England had been the prelude to the overturning of thrones.⁶⁷ Elisabeth Israels Perry has shown how from 1672 on, writing in defence of their history, the Protestant apologists had implied that there were strict limits to the powers of a ruler, relating to the laws of nature, the laws of the people, and the laws of Christianity. The claim is even made that these historical judgments "frightened the government", so that the Reformed thus "wrote their own epitaph". At the least one can say that there is evidence for the consequent deepening of suspicion and the widening of the gulf.⁶⁸

Benoist himself remains throughout obstinately loyal to the King, preferring to believe that the policies adopted with respect to the Reformed were due to ignorance, through information being deliberately withheld from him, or to prejudice encouraged by the malevolence or hostility of his advisers under clerical influence.⁶⁹ Later historians have shown that the King was in reality well aware of what was going on, and was impatient to see its culmination.⁷⁰

The usefulness of Benoist's work to succeeding generations, however, has not only been in the defensibility of its main conclusions, but also in the information preserved about a multitude of local incidents, persons, and circumstances not otherwise available, and especially in the insights he provides into the daily lives, customs, and attitudes of those about whom he writes. The five volumes have been abundantly mined by historians of the period: and the evidence of his reliability and conscientious fidelity to his sources has been added to over the years as scores of previously unknown manuscripts have come to light, many to be published in the Bulletin of the Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français. This is what he himself sought, as the last sentence of his History implies: "It is enough for me to have accomplished the Work I had undertaken, with all the care of which I am capable, & all the faithfulness I promised."⁷¹

It is not unusual to encounter the elder statesman turned historian, who interprets for his own and succeeding generations the events of his time seen from the perspective of one who helped to shape them. What is less common is the historian turned politician, who because of his historical research becomes the indispensable political consultant and adviser. The latter role is one that Elie Benoist filled conspicuously during the latter part of his life, and the account of it forms a necessary postscript to our study.

Protestant successes in the War of the League of Augsburg awakened hopes that its conclusion might witness a reversal of French policy, and the return and rehabilitation of the Reformed, either through the good offices of the Allies, or through an act of grace on the part of the King of France. With the encouragement of William III and of Heinsius, Grand Pensionary of Holland, a small committee with Benoist as a member began to serve as an instrument and channel of communication in order to influence peace negotiations towards this end. Both within and outside the Committee there soon appeared strong differences of opinion. These are clearly reflected in a large number of *mémoires* and letters contained in the unpublished papers of Benoist in the Antoine Court Collection in the University of Geneva, most of them in his own handwriting. They reveal unmistakably his own position in the controversy.

On the one hand, in agreement with the Committee as a whole, but in opposition to widespread sentiment among the scattered colonies of refugees, Benoist insists that their one hope is to depend entirely on the goodwill of the Allies. Humbly to petition the King for re-instatement is to use a method vainly tried over and over in earlier years; it would be to ask the King, who has always shown an invincible aversion to the Reformed faith, to undo an act in which he takes particular pride; to present a petition in the name of Protestants still in France would incriminate them since it is now a criminal act for them to meet together for common action, whereas to present it in the name of the Refugees is to speak on behalf of those whom the King regards as rebels; it would undermine the intervention of the Allies, since the King would have reason for saying that it was a domestic matter under advisement; it would be the request for an act of grace, rather than the demand for an act of justice backed up by the authority of their Allied protectors.⁷²

On another related matter, however, Benoist stood almost alone. Most Refugees tended to idealize the Edict of Nantes in retrospect, and to see its re-enactment as their objective. But Benoist knew — who better than he? — what an ambiguous and unsatisfactory charter it had proved to be when there were deliberate efforts to circumvent its provisions. He doggedly insists that a completely new Edict must supplant everything that has gone before. In a remarkable document, in which he sounds at times like someone writing in 1789 rather than 1695, he calls for terms that include: Freedom of conscience based on "natural and Divine Right", freedom of domicile and private

worship, extended freedom of public worship and of the exercise of discipline, freedom of education and of poor relief, impartial administration of justice, freedom to enjoy natural and civil rights regarding the holding of property, the rearing of children, and eligibility for trades, professions, offices, and dignities. The safeguards are spelled out with equal care, including if possible acceptance by the Estates General, the public display of the Edict like a Bill of Rights, and above all the guarantee by the Allies, among them the English Parliament.⁷³

In the event, the hopes of the Committee were doomed to disappointment. Despite strong support from the Lutheran powers, the Allied plenipotentiaries were unable to write such terms into the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, but had to settle for a powerfully worded Mémoire, asking the King of France to restore confidence in his genuine desire for peace with the Protestant nations by restoring his own Protestant subjects.⁷⁴ When the long-delayed reply came, however, it was devastatingly intransigent. Wrote Benoist to the Refugees in Lausanne: "Then our Sovereigns reported to us that the King of France had declared by his plenipotentiaries that he would not permit a single one of those who had left his Kingdom for the sake of Religion to return there, on any pretext whatsoever, except on the condition of submitting to his will, and converting to the Roman Communion. . ." ⁷⁵

There was to be one more chance. The later War of the Spanish Succession ran its course: in 1711, two years before the peace was actually signed, a new commission was appointed by the Walloon Synod, with Benoist a member, the only personal link with the former Committee. In his correspondence he is as adamant as ever that the Edict of Nantes must not be restored. In its place the aim should be the securing for the Reformed of the freedom to practise their religion in public and private, and to exercise their discipline, without loss of civil rights or the forcing of their conscience.⁷⁶

It was to be the same story. The Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, despite "mémoires, letters, petitions, journeys, urgent pleas," contained no relief, no re-establishment.⁷⁷ Yet for Benoist, old and infirm and on the point of retirement, there was to be one ray of consolation: through the indefatigable efforts of the Marquis de Rochegude, and the generous and determined intercession of Queen Anne, the King of France in May, 1713, signed an order for the release of 136 Huguenot galley-slaves, and in March, 1714, released 44 more.⁷⁸

Such were the meagre results of twenty years of earnest activity on the part of Benoist and his colleagues to win through political channels the re-establishment and restoration of the Reformed Church of France, and the rehabilitation of those who had suffered and were suffering for the sake of conscience.

NOTES

1. Elisabeth Israels Perry, From Theology to History: French Religious Controversy and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).
2. [Elie Benoist], Histoire de l'Edit de Nantes, contenant les choses les plus remarquables qui se sont passées en France avant & après sa publication, à l'occasion de la diversité des Religions: Et principalement les Contraventions Inexecutions, Chicanes, Artifices, Violences, & autres Injustices, que les Reformez se plaignent d'y avoir souffertes, jusques à l'Edit de Révocation, en Octobre 1685. Avec ce qui a suivi ce nouvel Edit jusques à present (Delft: Chez Adrien Beman, 1693 [I-II], 1695 [III-V]). (Abbreviation: Histoire)
3. The most important sources for biographical information about Benoist are as follows: Jacques-George de Chauffepié, Nouveau Dictionnaire Historique et Critique pour servir de supplément ou de continuation au Dictionnaire Historique et Critique de Mr. Pierre Bayle (Amsterdam et la Haye, 1750), I, 228-242; Eugène & Emile Haag, La France Protestante (Paris, 1879), II, cols. 269-276; Paul Pascal, Elie Benoist et l'Eglise Réformée d'Alençon (Paris, 1892). In addition there are the consistory records in the Municipal Archives in Delft, the records of the Synod of the Walloon Church in the Municipal Archives in Leyden, and a number of Benoist's unpublished manuscripts, mémoires and letters in the Antoine Court Collection in the Archives of the University of Geneva; some are also to be found in the Library of the Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français in Paris.
4. Pascal, Elie Benoist, p. 31.
5. Chauffepié, Nouv. Dict., p. 228.
6. Benoist, Histoire, IV, 335-338.
7. Histoire, IV, 465f.
8. Archives Nationales, TT3, 230: 17(9-19); cf. Pascal, Elie Benoist, pp. 164-178.
9. Archives Nationales, TT3, 230: 17(52); Histoire, IV, 551.
10. Archives Nationales, TT3, 230: 17(53,54); cf. Pascal, Elie Benoist, pp. 189-195.
11. Lettre d'un pasteur banni de son pays à une église qui n'a pas fait son devoir dans la dernière persécution (Delft, 1686).
12. Municipal Archives of Delft: Register of the Consistory of the Walloon Church, pp. 48ff, 60, 61.
13. Histoire et apologie de la retraite des pasteurs à cause de la persécution de France (Francfort, 1687); Défense de l'Apologie pour les Pasteurs de France, Contre le livre intitulé Sentimens Désintéressez sur la Retraite des Pasteurs etc. (Francfort, 1688).
14. Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français (Abbreviation: Bull.), vol. 61 (1912), pp. 425-434: "Un Dessein des Pasteurs Exilés en Hollande". The spy's name was Pierre-Louis de Pons, seigneur de Tillières et Desforges: his treachery went undiscovered for three years. Benoist states that he was killed at the time of his arrest: Archives of the University of Geneva, Court Collection, vol. 15, folio 48ff: "Suite de l'Histoire de l'Edit de Nantes", p. 28.
15. [Jean Claude], Les Plaintes des Protestans cruellement opprimez dans le Royaume de France (Cologne, 1686).
16. "Suite de l'Histoire de l'Edit de Nantes", p. 7.
17. [Gaultier de Saint-Blancard], Histoire Apologétique ou Défense des Libertez des Eglises Réformées de France, 3 vols. (Mayence, 1688).

18. David-Augustin Brueys, Réponse aux Plaintes des Protestans Contre les moyens que l'on employe en France pour les réunir à l'Eglise, seconde édition (Paris, 1686).
19. Cf. [Charles Ancillon], L'Irrévocabilité de l'Edit de Nantes, Prouvée par les principes du Droit & de la Politique (Amsterdam, 1688).
20. Histoire, Préface Générale, folio d4.
21. Benoist pays tribute especially to the integrity and fairness of the Roman Catholic historians, Jacques-Auguste de Thou, author of Historia sui temporis (Paris, 1604-1620), and François Eudes de Mézeray, author of Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu'à Louis le Juste (Paris, 1685).
22. Histoire, Préf. Gén., folios d3, e3; III, Préf., folio ***2f; IV, 313.
23. Histoire, Préf. Gén., folio e2.
24. The manuscript is in the Library of the Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français: printed in Bull., vol. 38 (1889), pp. 411ff: "Une Lettre inédite d'Elie Benoist". Pascal, Elie Benoist, p. 117, makes a persuasive case for identifying the recipient of the letter as Joseph Ancillon, rather than as his nephew Charles Ancillon as suggested by the original editor.
25. Bull., vol. 7 (1859), pp. 274-290: "Appel d'un Historien du XVIIe Siècle".
26. Histoire, Préf. Gén., folio e2.
27. "Appel. . .", p. 289.
28. Histoire, I, 123, 127.
29. Histoire, I, 226-240; documents (I), pp. 62-98.
30. For example, a Decree of the Parlement of Toulouse, September 4th, 1681, that all illegitimate or exposed children must be raised as Catholics; followed on January 31st, 1682, by a Royal Declaration ordering that all those exposed or of illegitimate birth of whatever age (i.e. even octogenarians) must be instructed and raised as Catholics: Ministers, Elders, and Consistories, being subject to a fine of four thousand pounds for resistance to this command. Histoire, IV, 507, 536f; documents (V), CXXVI.
31. Histoire, I, 224.
32. Histoire, I, 273-278; 298; 362-366, 378-384, 392, 411; 340-354.
33. Histoire, II, 3-70.
34. Histoire, II, 23, 34; 179f, 331, 389f; 188-206, 208-223, 230-232; 486.
35. Histoire, II, Préf. d-d2.
36. Histoire, II, 274-286; documents (II), pp. 49-53; II, 287-298.
37. Histoire, II, 58-60: cf. I, 126-129; II, 353-355; 359-408.
38. Histoire, III, 158; documents (III), VI. "Religion Prétendue Réformée" had been the official designation for the Reformed since the 1570's, an instance occurring as early as 1562: Bull., vol. 88 (1939), p. 357.
39. Histoire, II, 413-414; 577.
40. Histoire, III, 203-208, 212f; 340-342; 367-392; documents (III), XL.
41. Jean Filleau, Décisions catholiques, ou Recueil général des arrests rendus en toutes les cours souveraines de France en exécution ou interprétation des édits qui concernent l'exercice de la religion prétendue réformée, avec les raisons fondamentales desdits arrests tirées de la doctrine des pères de l'Eglise, des conciles, et des lois civiles et politiques du royaume (Poitiers, 1668).

42. Bernard Meynier, s.j., De l'Execution de l'Edit de Nantes (1662); Véritez (1665); De l'Edit de Nantes executé selon les intentions de Henry le Grand, en ce qui concerne l'établissement d'exercice public de la R.P.R., avec les articles secrets de l'édit du 17 septembre 1577 (Paris, 1670).
43. Pierre Bernard, Maximes à observer au jugement des partages faits par Messieurs les Commissaires executeurs de l'Edit de Nantes (1664); Explication de l'Edit de Nantes par les autres édits de pacification et arrêts de règlement (1666).
44. Histoire, III, 573f; documents (III), LXXXIV, Maximæ; IV, 195.
45. Histoire, IV, 26; 100-108; 296f; 520-522.
46. Histoire, V, 794.
47. Histoire, I, 12.
48. Histoire, IV, 550-553; documents (V), p. 143.
49. Histoire, V, 729-742 et passim.
50. Histoire, IV, 459-469; V, 832-865.
51. Histoire, V, 946-957, 962-984.
52. Histoire, V, 979-988.
53. Archives of the University of Geneva, Court Collection, vol. 48, #XXX: "Mémoire touchant le traitement fait en France cy-devant aux Réformez et celui qu'on devroit leur faire à l'avenir".
54. Histoire, V, 1012; 957-962. Vauban and Saint-Simon among contemporaries perceived this clearly.
55. F. Strowski, Pascal et son temps (Paris, 1907), vol. I, p. 1: cited in E. G. Léonard, Le Protestant Français (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), p. 33; cf. also Samuel Mours, Le Protestantisme en France au XVIIe Siècle (Paris: Librairie Protestante, 1967), pp. 45ff.
56. E. G. Léonard, Histoire Générale du Protestantisme, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961-1964), II, 317-319, 350f.
57. Ernest Lavisse, Histoire de France, vol. 7 (Paris, 1906), II, 43.
58. J. H. Mariéjol in Lavisse, Hist. de France, vol. 6 (Paris, 1905), I, 423; II, 86.
59. John Viénot, Histoire de la Réforme Française, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1926, 1934), I, 453.
60. Henry M. Baird, The Huguenots and Henry of Navarre, 2 vols. (New York, 1886), II, 429f.
61. Léonard, Le Protestant Français, p. 32
62. Baird, The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 2 vols. (New York, 1895), I, 73, 76.
63. Cornelis de Witt, Au service de la Cause (1621) (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1922), p. 30; Lavisse, Hist. de France, vol. 6: II, 214; Henri de la Garde, Le Duc de Rohan et les Protestants sous Louis XIII (Paris, 1884), p. 4.
64. Léonard, Le Protestant Français, p. 34.
65. Histoire, V, 1013-1014: a position endorsed by Léonard, Hist. Gén., II, 362-364, and Mours, op. cit., pp. 45ff.
66. Histoire, documents (III), p. 15.

67. Histoire, IV, 414.
68. Perry, From Theology to History. . ., pp. 195, 192, 196.
69. For example, Histoire, IV, 460: "Of himself without contradiction the King wanted no violence; & he had only been persuaded to destroy the Reformed by positive assurances that he would achieve his purpose by fair & gentle ways."
70. Baird, The Huguenots and the Revocation etc., I, 424f. 489f, 507f; Lavissee, Hist. de France, vol. 7: II, 74.
71. Histoire, V, 1019.
72. Archives of the University of Geneva, Court Collection, vol. 15, folios 211ff: "Dificultez [sic] qui font voir que la proposition de présenter une Requete au Roy de France pour le rétablissement des Eglises n'est pas recevable."
73. Court Collection, vol. 48, #XVI: "Mémoire sur le sujet du rétablissement des Eglises de France".
74. [Pierre Jurieu], Relation de tout ce qui s'est fait dans les Affaires de la Religion Réformée. & pour ses intérêts, depuis le commencement des Négotiations de la Paix de Reswik [sic], (Rotterdam, 1698), pp. 10f.
75. Court Collection, vol. 15, folio 114: Letter to the Directors of Lausanne, March 4th, 1698.
76. Court Collection, vol. 48, #XXXII: "Mémoire sur la demande du rétablissement de l'Edit de Nantes".
77. Manuscript letter in the Synodal Registers of the Walloon Church, Municipal Archives of Leyden, pp. 149ff; found also in Bull., vol. 26 (1877), pp. 516ff.
78. Bull., vol. 38 (1889), pp. 225-239: "La Libération des Forçats pour la Foi en 1713 et 1714".

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