

The rites of violence
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 (1973)

This extract is from an article which did much to indicate that there were underlying patterns to the apparently senseless cruelties which were perpetrated during the wars of religion. It must remain a matter of some doubt and speculation as to whether the evidence upon which we rely for the incidents which she cites is reliable testimony for what actually went on. Stereotypes played a powerful role in contemporaries' understanding of what was going on around them.

These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the Lord God of thy fathers giveth thee.... Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:

And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place [Deuteronomy 12: 1-3]. Thus spoke a Calvinist pastor to his flock in 1562.

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying Let us go serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers.... Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him.... But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people....

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known.... Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly and all that is therein [Deuteronomy 13: 6,8-9,12-13,15].

And [Jehu] lifted up his face to the window and said, Who is on my side? Who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw [Jezebel] down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.... And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.... And [Jehu] said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah ... saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field [2 Kings 9: 32-33, 35-37].

Thus in 1568 Parisian preachers held up to their Catholic parishioners the end of a wicked idolater. Whatever the intentions of pastors and priests, such words were among the many spurs to religious riot in sixteenth-century France. By religious riot I mean, as a preliminary definition, any violent action, with words or weapons, undertaken against

religions targets by people who were not acting officially and formally as agents of political and ecclesiastical authority....

What then can we learn of the goals of popular religious violence? What were the crowds intending to do and why did they think they must do it? Their behavior suggests, first of all, a goal akin to preaching: the defense of true doctrine and the refutation of false doctrine through dramatic challenges and tests. "You blaspheme," shouts a woman to a Catholic preacher in Montpellier in 1558; and, having broken the decorum of the service, she leads part of the congregation out of the church. "You lie," shouts a sheathmaker in the midst of the Franciscan's Easter sermon in Lyon, and his words are underscored by the gunshots of Huguenots waiting in the square. "Look," cries a weaver in Tournai, as he seizes the elevated host from the priest, "deceived people, do you believe this is the King, Jesus Christ, the true God and Savior? Look!" And he crumbles the wafer and escapes. "Look," says a crowd of image-breakers to the people of Albiac in 1561, showing them the relics they have seized from the Carmelite monastery, "look, they are only animal bones." And the slogan of the Reformed crowds as they rush through the streets of Paris, of Toulouse, of La Rochelle, of Angoulême is "The Gospel! The Gospel! Long live the Gospel!"

Catholic crowds answer this kind of claim to truth in Angers by taking a French Bible —well-bound and gilded, seized in the home of a rich merchant— and parading it through the streets on the end of a halberd. "There's the truth hung. There's the truth of the Huguenots, the truth of all the devils." Then, throwing it into the river, "There's the truth of all the devils drowned." And if the Huguenot doctrine was true, why didn't the Lord come and save them from their killers? So a crowd of Orléans Catholics taunted its victims in 1572: "Where is your God? Where are your prayers and Psalms? Let him save you if he can." Even the dead were made to speak in Normandy and Provence, where leaves of the Protestant Bible were stuffed into the mouths and wounds of corpses. "They preached the truth of their God. Let them call him to their aid."

The same refutation was, of course, open to Protestants. A Protestant crowd corners a baker guarding the holy-wafer box in Saint Médard's Church in Paris in 1561. "Messieurs," he pleads, "do not touch it for the honor of Him who dwells here." "Does your God of paste protect you now from the pains of death?" was the Protestant answer before they killed him. True doctrine can be defended in sermon or speech, backed up by the magistrate's sword against the heretic. Here it is defended by dramatic demonstration, backed up by the violence of the crowd.

A more frequent goal of these riots, however, is that of ridding the community of dreaded pollution. The word "pollution" is often on the lips of the violent, and the concept serves well to sum up the dangers that rioters saw in the dirty and diabolic enemy. A priest brings ornaments and objects for singing the Mass into a Bordeaux jail. The Protestant prisoner smashes them all. "Do you want to blaspheme the Lord's name everywhere? Isn't it enough that the temples are defiled? Must you also profane prisons so nothing is unpolluted?" "The Calvinists have polluted their hands with every kind of sacrilege men can think of," writes a doctor of theology in 1562. Not long after, at the Sainte Chapelle, a man seizes the elevated host with his "polluted hands" and crushes it under foot. The worshipers beat him up and deliver him to the agents of Parlement. The extent to which Protestants

could be viewed as vessels of pollution is suggested by a popular belief about the origin of the nickname "Huguenots." In the city of Tours, *le roi Huguet* was the generic name for ghosts who, instead of spending their time in Purgatory, came back to rattle doors and haunt and harm people at night. Protestants went out at night to their lascivious conventicles, and so the priests and the people began to call them Huguenots in Tours and then elsewhere. Protestants were thus as sinister as the spirits of the dead, whom one hoped to settle in their tombs on All Souls' Day.

One does not have to listen very long to sixteenth-century voices to hear the evidence for the uncleanness and profanation of either side. As for the Protestants, Catholics knew that, in the style of earlier heretics, they snuffed out the candles and had sexual intercourse after the voluptuous psalm-singing of their nocturnal conventicles. When their services became public, it was no better, for their Holy Supper was perceived (in the words of a merchant-draper of Lyon) as disordered and drunken, "a bacchanalia." But it was not just the fleshly license with which they lived that was unclean, but the things they said in their "pestilential" books and the things they did in hatred of the mass, the sacraments, and the whole Catholic religion. As the representative of the clergy said at the Estates of Orléans, the heretics intended to leave "no place in the Kingdom which was dedicated, holy, and sacred to the Lord, but would only profane churches, demolish altars, and break images."

The Protestants' sense of Catholic pollution also stemmed to some extent from their sexual uncleanness, here specifically of the clergy. Protestant polemic never tired of pointing to the lewdness of the clergy with their "concubines." It was rumored that the Church of Lyon had an organization of hundreds of women—sort of temple prostitutes—at the disposition of priests and canons; and an observer pointed out with disgust how after the First Religious War the mass and the brothel reentered Rouen together. One minister even claimed that the clergy were for the most part sodomites. But more serious than the sexual abominations of the clergy was the defilement of the sacred by Catholic ritual life, from the diabolic magic of the mass to the idolatrous worship of images. The mass is "vile filth"; "no people pollute the House of the Lord in every way more than the clergy." Protestant converts talked of their own past lives as a time of befoulment and dreaded present "contamination" from Catholic churches and rites.

Pollution was a dangerous thing to suffer in a community, from either a Protestant or a Catholic point of view, for it would surely provoke the wrath of God. Terrible windstorms and floods were sometimes taken as signs of His impatience on this count. Catholics, moreover, had also to worry about offending Mary and the saints; and though the anxious, expiatory processions organized in the wake of Protestant sacrilege might temporarily appease them, the heretics were sure to strike again. It is not surprising, then, that so many of the acts of violence performed by Catholic and Protestant crowds have (as we shall see more fully later on) the character either of rites of purification or of a paradoxical desecration, intended to cut down on uncleanness by placing profane things, like chrism, back in the profane world where they belonged.

This concern of Catholic and Protestant crowds to destroy polluting elements is reminiscent of the insistence of revolutionary millenarian movements that the wicked be exterminated that the godly may rule. The resemblance is real, but is limited. Our Catholic

and Protestant rioters have a conviction not so much of their immanent godliness as of the rightness of their judgments, envisage not so much a society of saints as a holier society of sinners. For Catholic zealots, the extermination of the heretical "vermin" promised the restoration of unity to the body social and the reinforcement of some of its traditional boundaries:

And let us all say in unison:
 Long live the Catholic religion
 Long live the King and good parishioners,
 Long live faithful Parisians,
 And may it always come to pass
 That every person goes to Mass,
 One God, one Faith, one King.

For Protestant zealots, the purging of the priestly "vermin" promised the creation of a new kind of unity within the body social, all the tighter because false gods and monkish sects would no longer divide it. Relations within the social order would be purer, too, for lewdness and love of gain would be limited. As was said of Lyon after its "deliverance" in 1562:

Lyon has changed indeed....
 The profit of Mercury, the dance of Venus
 And presumption, too, each man has left aside.

And again:

When this town so vain
 Was filled
 With idolatry and dealings
 Of usury and lewdness,
 It had clerics and merchants aplenty.
 But once it was purged
 And changed
 By the Word of God,
 That brood of vipers
 Could hope no more
 To live in so holy a place.

Crowds might defend truth and crowds might purify, but there was also a third aspect to the religious riot — a political one. E. P. Thompson has shown how in the eighteenth-century English food riot, the crowd's behavior was legitimated by a widely held belief that it was acting in place of the government. If the justices of the peace failed to do their legal duty in guaranteeing the food supply, then the crowd would carry out the provisions of the Assize for them. I have found the same thing to be true, at least as far as the *menu peuple* are

concerned, in the great grain riot, or *rebeine*, of Lyon in 1529. Under the slogan "the commune is rising against the hoarders of grain," the crowd met on the grounds where municipal assemblies were ordinarily held and then went about opening the municipal granary and seizing grain from wealthy people with ample supplies — actions which the city council had undertaken in the past but had failed to do promptly during the current crisis. In the grain riot of Provins in 1573, the artisans seized grain that had been sold at a high price to nonresidents of the city because the civic authorities had failed to provision the town at an honest price.

Now we can deduce some of the same assumptions from the actions of the religious crowds of the mid-sixteenth century. When the magistrate had not used his sword to defend the faith and the true church and to punish the idolaters, then the crowd would do it for him. Thus, many religious disturbances begin with the ringing of the tocsin, as in a time of civic assembly or emergency. Some riots end with the marching of the religious "wrongdoers" on the other side to jail. In 1561, for instance, Parisian Calvinists, fearing that the priests and worshipers in Saint Médard's Church were organizing an assault on their services in the Patriarche garden next door, first rioted in Saint Médard and then seized some fifteen Catholics as "mutinous" and led them off, "bound like galley slaves," to the Châtelet prison.

If the Catholic killing of Huguenots has in some ways the form of a rite of purification, it also sometimes has the form of an imitation of the magistrate. The mass executions of Protestants at Merindol and Cabrières in Provence and at Meaux in the 1540's, duly ordered by the Parlements of Aix and of Paris as punishment for heresy and high treason, anticipate crowd massacres of later decades. The Protestants themselves sensed this: the devil, unable to extinguish the light of the Gospel through the sentences of judges, now tried to obscure it through furious war and a murderous populace. Whereas before they were made martyrs by one executioner, now it is at the hands of "infinite numbers of them, and the swords of private persons have become the litigants, witnesses, judges, decrees, and executors of the strangest cruelties."

Similarly, official acts of torture and official acts of desecration of the corpses of certain criminals anticipate some of the acts performed by riotous crowds. The public execution was, of course, a dramatic and well-attended event in the sixteenth century, and the woodcut and engraving documented the scene far and wide. There the crowd might see the offending tongue of the blasphemer pierced or slit, the offending hands of the desecrater cut off. There the crowd could watch the traitor decapitated and disemboweled, his corpse quartered, and the parts borne off for public display in different sections of the town. The body of an especially heinous criminal was dragged through the streets, attached to a horse's tail. The image of exemplary royal punishment lived on for weeks, even years, as the corpses of murderers were exposed on gallows or wheels, and the heads of rebels on posts. We are not surprised to learn, then, that the body of Admiral Coligny had already been thrown out of the window by the king's men and stoned by the Duc de Guise hours before the popular attacks on it began in 1572. Furthermore, crowds often took their victims to places of official execution, as in Paris in 1562, when the Protestant printer Roe Le Frere was dragged for burning to the Marché aux Pourceaux, and in Toulouse the same year, when a merchant slain in front of a church was dragged for burning to the town hall. "The king salutes you," said a

Catholic crowd in Orléans to a Protestant trader, then put a cord around his neck as official agents might do, and led him off to be killed.

Riots also occurred in connection with judicial cases, either to hurry the judgment along or when verdicts in religious cases were considered too severe or too lenient by "the voice of the people." Thus in 1569 in Montpellier, a Catholic crowd forced the judge to condemn an important Huguenot prisoner to death in a hasty "trial," then seized him and hanged him in front of his house. In 1551 a masked Protestant group kidnapped and released a goldsmith's journeyman who had been condemned in Lyon for heresy and was being removed to Paris. And in 1561 in Marsillargues, when prisoners for heresy were released by royal decree, a Catholic crowd "rearrested" them and executed and burned them in the streets. The most fascinating example of the assumption of the magistrate's role by a crowd, however, is the mock trial held by the boys of Provins in October 1572. A Huguenot had been hanged for thefts and killings committed during the religious troubles. Groups of boys put ropes around his neck and his feet, but a tug-of-war could not resolve which way the corpse was to be dragged. The boys then elected lawyers and judges from among their midst for a trial. Before the eyes of a hundred spectators, they argued the penalty, appealing from the decision of the real judge that the Huguenot be only hanged and not burned alive as befitted a heretic. After the boys' decision, the corpse was dragged through the streets by the feet and burned.

The Calvinist crowds that seized religious buildings and destroyed images also believed they were taking on the role of the authorities. When Protestants in Montpellier occupied a church in 1561, they argued that the building belonged to them already, since its clergy had been wholly supported by merchants and burghers in the past and the property belonged to the town. In Agen the same year, with Reformed ministers preaching that it was the office of the magistrate alone to eradicate the marks of idolatry, Protestant artisans decided one night that "if one tarried for the Consistory, it would never be done" and proceeded to break into the town's churches and destroy all the altars and the images.

To be sure, the relation of a French Calvinist crowd to the magisterial model is different from that of a French Catholic crowd. The king had not yet chastised the clergy and "put all idolatry to ruin and confusion," as Protestants had been urging him since the early 1530's. Calvinist crowds were using his sword as the king ought to have been using it and as some princes and city councils outside of France had already used it. Within the kingdom before 1560 city councils had only indicated the right path, as they set up municipal schools and lay-controlled welfare systems, or otherwise limited the sphere of action of the clergy. During the next years, as revolution and conversion created Reformed city councils, governors, and rulers (such as the queen of Navarre) within France, Calvinist crowds finally had local magistrates whose actions they could prompt or imitate.

In general, then, the crowds in religious riots in sixteenth-century France can be seen as sometimes acting out clerical roles —defending true doctrine or ridding the community of defilement in a violent version of priest or prophet— and sometimes acting out magisterial roles. Clearly some riotous behavior, such as the extensive pillaging done by both Protestants and Catholics, cannot be subsumed under these heads; but just as the prevalence of pillaging

in a war does not prevent us from typing it as a holy war, so the prevalence of pillaging in a riot should not prevent us from seeing it as essentially religious....

What then of the occasions for religious riot? By "occasions" I do not mean here the specific things, such as the Saint Bartholomew's rumor of conspiracy to kill the king, that have triggered particular instances of religious riot. Nor do I mean anything as grand as theories of structural strain, relative deprivation among the people, or crises among the elite that might account for the timing of all riots. In fact, I am considering the chronological question of timing very little in this paper —that is, I am not asking why there are a cluster of religious disturbances in Lyon, say, in the early 1550's, a cluster of religious disturbances throughout France in the early 1560's, and so on. I do not have the extensive data upon which to base such an analysis. Working from the crowd behavior itself, I have merely stressed the fact that religious riot is likely to occur when it is believed that religious and/or political authorities are failing in their duties or need help in fulfilling them.

All I would add in regard to the timing and triggers of religious riot is that a rise in grain prices does not seem to be a significant variable. For instance, the religious disturbances in Toulouse in the first five months of 1562 correspond to a period of grain prices that were the same as, or lower than, those of the preceding two years. The supply was surely more abundant there than during the hard times in the spring and early summer of 1557, when there was no religious disturbance. The Catholic attack on the conventicle on the rue Saint Jacques in September 1557 occurred at a time when grain had dropped to a good low price in Paris and was plentiful. The Saint Médard riot at the end of 1561 took place when prices were rising but were far from what contemporaries would have thought a famine level. As for the 1572 massacres, they occurred at a time of slowly rising grain prices, but not yet of serious dearth, with August-September prices in Paris being a little lower than those of October 1571, and in Toulouse lower than those of the immediately preceding summer months. In short, grain prices are relevant to religious riot in France only in the general and indirect sense that the inflation of the last 40 years of the sixteenth century had an effect on many aspects of life, as did the Religious Wars themselves. Perhaps it is only in this broad sense that they are part of the background to the Flemish iconoclastic movement of 1566 (I am here raising a query about the interpretation of Verlinden and his colleagues), the specific trigger for the riots being more likely, as Crespin claimed, the sudden upsurge in public Protestant preaching. What are specific rises in grain prices correlated with in France? Why, with grain riots and penitential white processions to beg for rain.

Questions of chronological timing apart, then, the occasion for most religious violence was during the time of religious worship or ritual and in the space which one or both groups were using for sacred purposes. There were exceptions, of course. Profanation of religious statues and paintings might occur at night, especially in the early years when it was a question of a small number of Protestants sneaking into a church. Widespread murder, as in the 1571 massacres, might occur anywhere —in the streets, in bedrooms. But much of the religious riot is timed to ritual, and the violence seems often a curious continuation of the rite.

Almost every type of public religious event has a disturbance associated with it. The sight of a statue of the Virgin at a cross-road or in a wall-niche provokes a Protestant group

to mockery of those who reverence her. A fight ensues. Catholics hide in a house to entrap Huguenots who refuse to doff their hats to a Virgin nearby, and then rush out and beat up the heretics. Baptism: in Nemours, a Protestant family has its baby baptized on All Souls' Day according to the new Reformed rite. With the help of an aunt, a group of Catholics steals it away for rebaptism. A drunkard sees the father and the godfather and other Protestants discussing the event in the streets, claps his sabots and shouts, "Here are the Huguenots who have come to massacre us." A crowd assembles, the tocsin is rung, and a three-hour battle takes place. Funeral: in Toulouse, at Easter time, a Protestant carpenter tries to bury his Catholic wife by the new Reformed rite. A Catholic crowd seizes the corpse and buries it. The Protestants dig it up and try to rebury her. The bells are rung, and with a great noise a Catholic crowd assembles with stones and sticks. Fighting and sacking ensue.

Religious services: a Catholic mass is the occasion for an attack on the host or the interruption of a sermon, which then leads to a riot. Protestant preaching in a home attracts large Catholic crowds at the door, who stone the house or otherwise threaten the worshipers. In the years when the Reformed services are public, the rivalry of the rites becomes graphic. At Saint Médard's Church, the Vesper bells are rung to drown out the pastor's sermon nearby; at Provins, the Huguenots sing their Psalms to drown out the mass.

But these encounters are as nothing compared to the disturbances that cluster around processional life. Corpus Christi Day, with its crowds, colored banners, and great crosses, was the chance for Protestants not to put rugs in front of their doors; for Protestant women to sit ostentatiously in their windows spinning; for heroic individuals, like the painter Denis de Vallois in Lyon, to throw themselves on the "God of paste" so as "to destroy him in every parish in the world." Corpus Christi Day was the chance for a procession to turn into an assault on, and slaughter of, those who had so offended the Catholic faith, its participants shouting, as in Lyon in 1561, "For the flesh of God, we must kill all the Huguenots." A Protestant procession was a parade of armed men and women in their dark clothes going off to services at their temple or outside the city gates, singing Psalms and spiritual songs that to Catholic ears sounded like insults against the church and her sacraments. It was an occasion for children to throw stones, for an exchange of scandalous words— "idolaters," "devils from the Pope's purgatory," "Huguenot heretics, living like dogs"— and then finally for fighting. Sometimes the two processions encountered each other, as in Sens in 1562. The Calvinists would not give way and insisted upon passing through the center of the Catholic procession. The groups confronted each other again after services, and the Catholics, aided by processions from peasant villages, prevailed in a bloody battle.

The occasions that express most concisely the contrast between the two religious groups, however, are those in which a popular festive Catholicism took over the streets with dancing, masks, banners, costumes, and music — "lascivious abomination," according to the Protestants. In Lyon, when Catholics did their traditional summer dancing on St. Peter's Day 1565, the Huguenots attacked them in a riot that led eventually to the exile of Pierre Viret and another pastor from the city. In Montpellier in the summer of 1561, the confraternities organized Sunday processions of hundreds of men, women, and children with *pains bénits* ("blessed loaves of bread")— dancing, jumping, and crying "in spite of the Huguenots we dance".

But festivities led to more than spite and intimidation. For Mardi Gras at Issoudun in 1562, a Catholic group organized a dramatic costumed dance for thirteen pilgrims, thirteen reapers, thirteen wine-harvesters and thirteen tithes-collectors, all armed with large macabre tools. The Protestants got hold of the scenario for this grisly carnival and were able to get the players arrested. In Pamiers in 1566, however, the festive youth society, with its popes, emperors, bishops, and abbots, was able to dance its Pentecostal dance to the end. The Calvinists, who had stoned earlier dances, tried to prevent the affair, but the Catholic group insisted. "If [the heretics] can preach secretly, then we can dance —or it will cost five hundred heads." After a procession with relics and a silver statue of St. Anthony, the dancing began, three by three, with tambourines and minstrels. When they got to the quarter where Pastor Du Moulin was preaching, the song turned into "kill, kill," and serious fighting began that was to divide the town for three days. "It's a long time since I was up to my elbows in Huguenot blood," one of the dancers said. He was to be disappointed, for this time it was the Huguenots who won.

These occasions for religious riot show us how characteristic was the scenario for the Paris St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. A marriage —one of the great rites of passage, but here, as with the baptism of Nemours and the burial at Toulouse, conflict over whether its form should be Catholic or Protestant— and then wedding masques of all kinds. In one, later seen as an allegory of coming events, the king and his brothers prevent wandering knights from entering Paradise and are pulled down to Hell by demons. Soon after, as in Pamiers, the festivity turned into a rite of violence.

As with liturgical rites, there were some differences between the rites of violence of Catholic and Protestant crowds. The good Calvinist authors of the *Histoire ecclésiastique* went so far as to claim that outside of the murder of a certain Seigneur de Fumel, killed in the Agenois "not for religion but for his tyrannies," those of the Reformed Religion made war only on images and altars, which do not bleed, while those of the Roman religion spilled blood with every kind of cruelty. Though there is some truth in this distinction, Protestant rioters did in fact kill and injure people, and not merely in self-defense; and Catholic rioters did destroy religious property. At the Patriarche garden in Paris, at Vassy, at Senlis, Catholics smashed the pulpits and benches used in Reformed worship; at Amiens they went on to burn them. As houses that had been used for Protestant worship in Meaux and Paris were ordered to be razed by Parliamentary decree, so in Lyon in 1568 a Catholic crowd razed the Protestant Temple de Paradis, which hundreds of psalm-singing men, women, and children had erected only a few years before. Both Protestant and Catholic crowds destroyed books. The Catholic target was especially the French Bibles that they had so often seen burned publicly by the authorities in the 1540's and 1550's. The Calvinist targets were especially the priests' manuals, the missals, and the breviaries, which Protestant writers like Viret had already desecrated in gross and comic satire.

Nevertheless, when all this is said, the iconoclastic Calvinist crowds still come out as the champions in the destruction of religious property ("with more than Turkish cruelty," said a priest). This was not only because the Catholics had more physical accessories to their rite, but also because the Protestants sensed much more danger and defilement in the wrongful use of material objects. In Pamiers, the Catholic vicar might drop his Black Virgin of Foix

when she failed to bring good weather; but then he tenderly repaired her broken neck with an iron pin. When the Protestants found her, they promptly burned the head in Pamiers and the body in Foix.

In bloodshed, the Catholics are the champions (remember we are talking of the actions of Catholic and Protestant crowds, not of their armies). I think this is owing not only to their being in the long run the stronger party numerically in most cities, but also to their having a greater sense of the persons of heretics as sources of danger and defilement. Thus, injury and murder were a preferred mode of purifying the body social.

Furthermore, the preferred targets for physical attack differ in the Protestant and Catholic cases. As befitting a movement intending to overthrow a thousand years of clerical "tyranny" and "pollution," the Protestants' targets were primarily priests, monks, and friars. That their ecclesiastical victims were usually unarmed (as Catholic critics hastened to point out) did not make them any less harmful in Protestant eyes, or any more immune from the wrath of God. Lay people were sometimes attacked by Protestant crowds, too, examples being the festive dancers who were stoned at Pamiers and Lyon and the worshipers who were killed at Saint Médard's Church. But there is nothing that quite resembles the style and extent of the slaughter of the 1572 massacres. The Catholic crowds were, of course, happy to catch a pastor when they could, but the death of any heretic would help in the cause of cleansing France of these perfidious sowers of disorder and disunion. Indeed, although the number of women killed by Protestant crowds seems to have been very small, observers' reports show that about one out of ten people killed by Catholic crowds in the provinces in 1571 was a woman (one of those "presumptuous" females we have considered in Chapter 3), and the ratio was higher in Paris....

Before turning to the composition of the urban crowds, let us look a little further at what I have called their rites of violence. Is there any way we can order the terrible, concrete details of filth, shame, and torture reported from both Protestant and Catholic riots? I would suggest that they can be reduced to a repertory of actions from the Bible, from the liturgy, from the action of political authority, or from the traditions of popular folk justice, intended to purify the religious community and humiliate the enemy and thus make him less harmful.

The religious significance of destruction by water or fire is clear enough. The rivers that receive so many Protestant corpses are not merely convenient mass graves, they are temporarily a kind of holy water, an essential feature of Catholic rites of exorcism. The fire that razes the house of a Protestant apothecary in Montpellier leaves behind it not the smell of death, of the heretic whom the crowd had hanged, but of spices, lingering in the air for days, like incense. If Protestants have rejected holy water and incense, they still follow Deuteronomy in accepting fire as a sacred means of purification.

Let us take a more difficult case, the troubling case of the desecration of corpses. This is primarily an action of Catholic crowds in the sixteenth century. Protestant crowds could be very cruel indeed in torturing living priests, but paid little attention to them when they were dead. (Perhaps this is related to the Protestant rejection of Purgatory and prayers for the dead: the souls of the dead experience immediately Christ's presence or the torments of the damned, and thus the dead body is no longer so dangerous or important an object to the living. Popular Protestant poetry represented priests as ghouls who fed off the dead roasted in

Purgatory.) What interested Protestants was digging up bones that were being treated as sacred objects by Catholics and perhaps burning them, after the fashion of Josiah in I Kings. The Catholics, however, were not content with burning or drowning heretical corpses. That was not cleansing enough. The bodies had to be weakened and humiliated further. To an eerie chorus of "strange whistles and hoots," they were thrown to the dogs like Jezebel, they were dragged through the streets, they had their genitalia and internal organs cut away, which were then hawked through the city in a ghoulish commerce.

Let us also take the embarrassing case of the desecration of religious objects by filthy and disgusting means. It is the Protestants, as we have seen, who are concerned about objects, who are trying to show that Catholic objects of worship have no magical power. It is not enough to cleanse by swift and energetic demolition, not enough to purify by a great public burning of the images, as in Albiac, with the children of the town ceremonially reciting the Ten Commandments around the fire. The line between the sacred and the profane was also redrawn by throwing the sacred host to the dogs, by roasting the crucifix upon a spit, by using holy oil to grease one's boots, and by leaving human excrement on holy-water basins and other religious objects ...

And what of the living victims? Catholics and Protestants humiliated them by techniques borrowed from the repertory of folk justice. Catholic crowds lead Protestant women through the streets with muzzles on — a popular punishment for the scold in some parts of Europe— or with a crown of thorns. A form of charivari is used, where the noisy throng humiliates its victim by making him ride backward on an ass. In Blois in 1562, the Catholics did this to a Protestant saddler, poking him with a pike and shouting, "Oh, don't touch him, he belongs to the Queen Mother." In Montauban, a priest was ridden backward on an ass, his chalice in one hand, his host in the other, and his missal at an end of a halberd. At the end of his ride, he must crush his host and burn his own vestments. And, just as in the festive parade on an ass of henpecked husbands it was sometimes necessary to get a neighbor to replace the husband, so sometimes a Protestant had to replace the priest. Dressed in holy vestments, he would be led through the streets pretending to say mass, while the crowd with him sang in derision *Te Deum Laudamus* or a requiem.

With such actions, the crowds seem to be moving back and forth between the rites of violence and the realm of comedy. Are we at a Mardi Gras game, with its parodies and topsyturvy mockery? At Lyon, a Protestant, in the midst of sacking the Church of Saint Irénée, dresses up as the Saint with his episcopal ring around his neck. At Rouen, the host is paraded at the end of a Rogation Day's lance with a dragon on it: "The dragon has eaten the host!" At Mâcon in 1562, the familiar blessing from Numbers 6: 24-26 is parodied as Protestants are slain: "The lord God of Huguenots keep you, the great Devil bless you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you who play the dead." Murder finally began to be called a "farce" in Mâcon, the "farce of Saint Point," named after the lieutenant governor. The game was to go with some women after a party and get one or two Protestant prisoners from jail, have the ladies chat pleasantly with them as they walked to the Saône bridge, and then drown them.

These episodes disclose to us the underlying function of the rites of violence. As with the "games" of Christ's tormentors, which hide from them the full knowledge of what they do, so these charades and ceremonies hide from sixteenth-century rioters a full knowledge of

what they are doing. Like the legitimation for religious riot examined earlier in this essay, they are part of the "conditions for guilt-free massacre," to use a phrase from a recent study of violence in our own day. The crucial fact that the killers must forget is that their victims are human beings. These harmful people in the community —the evil priest or hateful heretic— have already been transformed for the crowd into "vermin" or "devils." The rites of religious violence complete the process of dehumanization. So in Meaux, where Protestants were being slaughtered with butchers' cleavers, a living victim was trundled to his death in a wheelbarrow while the crowd cried, "vinegar, mustard." And the vicar of the parish of Fouquebrune in the Angoumois was attached with the oxen to a plow and died from Protestant blows as he pulled....

Thus, in sixteenth-century France, we have seen crowds taking on the role of priest, pastor, or magistrate to defend doctrine or purify the religious community — either to maintain its Catholic boundaries and structure, or to re-form relations within it. We have seen that popular religious violence could receive legitimation from different features of political and religious life, as well as from the group identity of the people in the crowds. The targets and character of crowd violence differed somewhat between Catholics and Protestants, depending on their perception of the source of danger and on their religious sensibility. But in both cases, religious violence had a connection in time, place, and form with the life of worship, and the violent actions themselves were drawn from a store of punitive purificatory traditions current in sixteenth-century France.

Source:

Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence," *Past and Present* 59 (1973): 51-91