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The Lesser Nobility and the French Reformation

Philip Benedict

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Few subjects within the history of the French Reformation have received more attention over the centuries than that of the nobility's role within the movement, but the spotlight has usually been on the high aristocracy. No account of early French Protestantism can overlook Marguerite de Navarre, her daughter Jeanne d'Albret, Jeanne's husband Antoine de Bourbon, or Antoine's younger brother the prince of Condé. If the historical memory of France's Protestant minority has enshrined any person as its hero in the way that Luther became the hero of the German Reformation, that person would be the Admiral Coligny, whose monument, not Calvin's, stands outside the Temple de l'Oratoire in Paris. A deeply influential interpretation, most famously articulated by Lucien Romier in the early twentieth century and recently reiterated by Hugues Daussy in *Le parti huguenot*, argues that the movement only became politicized and seriously challenged public order when significant figures within the high nobility embraced the cause.¹ But to shed comparative light on Franz von Sickingen and the German Reformation, the spotlight must be turned toward the lesser nobility, whose situation resembled more closely the *Ritterschaft* of the German Rhineland, but concerning which the secondary literature is considerably spottier. A few Protestant theologians or literary figures of lesser noble stock, notably Theodore Beza and Agrippa d'Aubigné, have been

¹ *Lucien Romier*, *Le Royaume de Catherine de Médicis: la France à la veille des guerres de religion*, Vol. 2, Paris 1925, p. 260-265; *Hugues Daussy*, *Le parti huguenot. Chronique d'une désillusion (1557-1572)*, Geneva 2014, esp. p. 10 and passim. Also in this vein: *Richard Nürnberger*, *Die Politisierung des Französischen Protestantismus: Calvin und die Anfänge des protestantischen Radikalismus*, Tübingen 1948.

the object of a steady stream of scholarly studies.² For a brief moment after 1980, the vogue for social history created a small boom in local studies of the nobility, some of which examined topics pertinent to the Reformation, chiefly how many noblemen opted for Protestantism and why.³ The same questions also shaped two excellent synthetic essays prepared for prior conference volumes by leading French specialists.⁴ This contribution proposes to identify and explore a wider range of issues concerning the role of the lesser French nobility in the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. It will then recount in some detail the involvement of a single individual, Charles Dupuy, seigneur de Montbrun, whose adventurous life illustrates particularly well the ways in which at least one segment of the lesser nobility championed the Protestant cause.

First, some background is in order. Students of the German nobility may find the picture of brawls, blood feuds and naked bullying that the studies of Stuart Carroll and Michel Nassiet have shown to typify aristocratic comportment in many provinces to be familiar.⁵ Nonetheless, sixteenth-century France differed from the territories across the Vosges in being a large, relatively centralized monarchy with a substantial administrative apparatus and an army actively at war for much of the century. French aristocrats thus

² *Paul-F. Geisendorf*, Théodore de Bèze, Geneva 1949; *Scott M. Manetsch*, Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598, Leiden 2000; *Alain Dufour*, Théodore de Bèze. Poète et théologien, Geneva 2006; *Armand Garnier*, Agrippa d'Aubigné et le Parti Protestant. Contribution à l'histoire de la Réforme en France, Paris 1928; *André Thierry*, Agrippa d'Aubigné, auteur de l'"Histoire universelle", Lille, Atelier de Reproduction des Thèses, 1982; *Madeleine Lazard*, Agrippa d'Aubigné, Paris, 1998.

³ Key studies in this genre are *James B. Wood*, The Nobility of the Election of Bayeux, 1463-1666: Continuity through Change, Princeton 1980; *Janine Garrisson-Estèbe*, Protestants du Midi 1559-1598, Toulouse 1980, p. 22-28; *Jean-Marie Constant*, Nobles et paysans en Beauce aux XVIème et XVIIème siècles, Lille, Atelier de Reproduction des Thèses, 1981; *Kristen Neuschel*, Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth-Century France, Ithaca 1989; *Michel Cassan*, Le temps des guerres de religion. Le cas du Limousin (vers 1530-vers 1630), Paris 1996, p. 92-102.

⁴ *Jean-Marie Constant*, The Protestant Nobility in France during the Wars of Religion: A Leaven of Innovation in a Traditional World, in: *Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop, Marc Venard* (Eds.), Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585, Amsterdam 1999, p. 69-82; *Hugues Daussy*, Les élites face à la Réforme dans le royaume de France (ca. 1520-ca. 1570), in: *Philip Benedict, Silvana Seidel Menchi, Alain Tallon* (Eds.), La Réforme en France et en Italie. Contacts, comparaisons, contrastes, Rome 2007, p. 331-349.

⁵ *Stuart Carroll*, Blood and Violence in Early Modern France, Oxford 2006; *Michel Nassiet*, La Violence, une histoire sociale. France XVIe-XVIIIe siècles, Seyssel 2011.

differed from their German counterparts in that preferment derived more from attendance at court and was exercised more through formal institutions, offices and commands. The best analyses of the class distinguish three strata of unequal power and wealth: at the top, the great aristocrats who filled the key roles at court and in the army and built up extensive clientage networks through the influence that flowed from their ready access to the king; below them, the "*noblesse seconde*" of men exercising key command posts at the provincial level; and finally the great mass of those possessing noble status and privileges, constituting one to two per cent of the total population. This third group, our focus here, can in turn be divided into three categories based on its members' principal activities and lifestyle: the military nobles who participated regularly in France's numerous wars; the country gentlemen who directed most of their energies to the administration of the rural estates on which they lived; and an urban nobility that it is not yet appropriate to call the *noblesse de robe*, particularly numerous in the southern half of the kingdom, composed of town-dwelling gentlemen and those royal office-holders, lawyers and former merchants who had acquired a seigneurie and the status that went with it. The lesser nobility was thus itself diverse in lifestyle, education, and place of residence, perhaps more so than its Central European counterparts.⁶

One stock image about the nobility and the Reformation in France is that it was only when leading members of the Bourbon and Châtillon families converted in the late 1550s that the aristocracy began to shape the movement in significant ways; before then, Protestant heresy was a phenomenon of clergymen, artisans and non-noble members of the urban elites. This may well be an illusion bred by over-reliance on the martyrological tradition. Already before 1550, non-schismatic evangelical currents circulated in the

⁶ The literature on the French nobility as a whole is too vast to be cited. For some studies that reveal particularly well the range of situations that characterized the estate in the sixteenth century, see *Robert R. Harding*, *Anatomy of a Power Elite: The Provincial Governors of Early Modern France*, New Haven 1978; *Laurent Bourquin*, *Noblesse seconde et pouvoir en Champagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Paris 1994; *Ariane Boltanski*, *Les ducs de Nevers et l'État royal. Genèse d'un compromis (ca 1550-ca 1600)*, Geneva 2006; *Malcolm Walsby*, *The Counts of Laval: Culture, Patronage and Religion in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France*, Aldershot 2007; *Jonathan Dewald*, *The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parlement of Rouen 1499-1610*, Princeton 1980; *Madeleine Foisil*, *Le Sire de Gouberville, un gentilhomme normand au XVIe siècle*, Paris 1981.

milieu of Marguerite of Navarre and were embraced by two prominent figures of the *noblesse seconde*, Anne de Parthenay and her husband Antoine de Pons, governor of Saintonge, both of whom were members of the entourage of Renée de France that was driven from Ferrara in the mid-1540s for heterodoxy.⁷ Among Marguerite's household officers was Jacques Groslot, seigneur de Champ-Baudouin, descended from a rich Orléans merchant family, whose good wishes were passed along to Zwingli in a letter of 1524 and who later would lose his post as *bailli* of Orléans because of his heretical views.⁸ If few noblemen turn up in Crespin's martyrology, this is because aristocrats usually received preferential treatment from the French courts in heresy cases. Despite this, heresy trials do turn up suspects from the second estate as early as 1530, when a group of noble men and women in Picardy were denounced to the Parlement of Paris for supporting schoolmasters and preachers who attacked purgatory, the cult of the saints, auricular confession, and the mandatory fasts of the church. One of them, the seigneur de Cardonnet, was accused of publicly advocating clerical marriage and of telling female religious who requested alms to get married instead.⁹ In 1542, two Norman noblemen were even put to death by the Parlements of Paris and Bordeaux for "blasphemous and heretical speech" and "seditious blasphemy".¹⁰ If noblemen were under-represented among the early martyrs for the cause, they decidedly were not among refugees to Geneva. In 1549 that city's authorities opened a special register to keep track of the refugees flooding in. Of the first five hundred subjects of the French king who swore the required oath to "live according to God and the holy evangelical reformation", some 23, or 4.6 per cent, bore the honorifics "noble" or "*écuyer*".¹¹

⁷ E. Rodocanachi, *Renée de France, duchesse de Ferrare*, Paris 1896, p. 140-152, 167-173.

⁸ Information kindly furnished by Jonathan Reid. On Marguerite of Navarre's network more generally, see Reid, *King's Sister--Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549) and Her Evangelical Network*, Leiden 2009, with references to Groslot at p. 259, 321n and 353n.

⁹ William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements*, Cambridge MA 1999, esp. p. 188-190; Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les origines de la Réforme*, Vol. 3 *L'évangélisme (1521-1538)*, Paris 1914, p. 377-378.

¹⁰ Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, p. 93.

¹¹ Calculated from Paul-F. Geisendorff (Ed.), *Le livre des habitants de Genève I: 1549-1560*, Geneva 1957, p. 1-28. The count does not include Pierre d'Airebaudouze, who is

The sources for the history of French Protestantism change radically after 1555, when Reformed churches multiplied, bound themselves together in an institutional network sharing a common confession of faith, started to keep good internal records, and could be observed by the authorities when they met. Only after this date do the criteria and sources for determining attachment to the cause become clear and abundant enough to permit confident statements about who and how many became Protestant. The most precise studies concerning this era show that in the *bailliages* of Vendôme (Ile-de-France), Etampes (Ile-de-France), and Chateau-du-Loir (Maine), around ten percent of all nobles joined the Reformed churches. In the Limousin 13 percent did so. In the Beauce the percentage was 26 percent, in the Quercy 36 percent, and in the *élection* of Bayeux (Normandy) 40 percent.¹² Averaging these figures suggests that kingdom-wide perhaps one fifth of the nobility became Protestant. (The percentage of Protestants among the population as a whole is typically placed around one tenth.) These percentages should be understood not as applying at any one specific date, but as representing the fraction of noble individuals or families drawn to the movement at one point or another between 1555 and 1600.

Conversion to the faith often followed pre-existing networks of marital inter-connection between families, resulting in regional and clan clusters of Protestant strength. At the same time the movement split many families. Children converted despite their parents' opposition and brothers chose opposite religious camps, something that did not always overwrite family loyalty, as is shown by cases during the civil wars where Catholic noblemen helped out their Protestant kin when they were captured in battle or vice versa. A degree of correlation has been found in the Beauce between prior army service and Protestantism, suggesting either that the Huguenot cause may have provided an outlet for the martial impulses of the demobilized, as has been suggested by historians since at least the seventeenth century, or that something in the experience of battle and defeat prepared noblemen to conversion.¹³ What does not seem to have been the case is

not identified in the register as noble although he is known to be related to an important seigneurial family of Anduze.

¹² *Constant*, Protestant Nobility in France (cited note 4), p. 70 and passim summarizes the previous studies and offers an excellent overview of the question.

¹³ *Constant*, Nobles et paysans en Beauce (cited note 3), p. 322-329.

that those nobles who embraced Protestantism were disproportionately ones who had been impoverished by the inflation of the century and their inability to exercise effective estate management while away at war, as Romier famously suggested. In the *élection* of Bayeux, at least, the Huguenot nobles came disproportionately from the richer fifty per cent of the order.¹⁴ What is hardest to follow is exactly how Protestant ideas were first introduced and then spread within the networks of families that would become pillars of Protestantism. As is well known, women initiated the conversion of certain lineages.¹⁵ In the Beauce certain cases suggest that attendance at the University of Orléans and ties to the house of Bourbon may have been important.¹⁶ As we will see, where we do have evidence about what brought lesser noblemen into the Protestant camp, it often seems tinged by fable.

Once converted, lesser noblemen contributed to the great initial swell of Reformed church-building that saw upwards of a thousand congregations take shape in defiance of royal legislation between 1555 and 1572--seven hundred of them in the three-years from 1560 to 1562 alone--by founding, sheltering or protecting local churches. In a handful of cases, a noble convert may simply have taken over the local pulpit himself. The hostile but often well informed Catholic historian of the "birth, rise and decline of the heresies of our century", Florimond de Raemon, claimed that several *seigneurs de fief* declared themselves ministers without prior training by the Reformed church or the approval of its synods. "Thus did the Sieur de Cotondière near Falaise in Normandy," he asserts; "thus too the Sieur de Rotes near Condé-sur-Noireau."¹⁷ While no confirmation of these cases is to be found in that massive compilation of local church histories, the *Histoire ecclésiastique des Eglises Réformées au Royaume de France*, the work does note an inspirational sermon delivered in Poitiers in June 1561 by "Pierre Despres, the so-

¹⁴ Wood, Nobility of Bayeux (cited note 3), p. 163.

¹⁵ Nancy Lyman Roelker, The Appeal of Calvinism to French Noblewomen in the 16th Century, in: Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2 (1972), p. 168-195; David Nicholls, Social Change and Early Protestantism in France: Normandy 1520-62, in: European Studies Review 10 (1980), p. 291; Marc Seguin, Histoire de l'Aunis et de la Saintonge, Vol. 3 Le début des temps modernes (1480-1610), La Crèche 2005, p. 261.

¹⁶ Constant, Nobles et paysans en Beauce (cited note 3), p. 328.

¹⁷ Florimond de Raemon, L'histoire de la naissance, progresz et decadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle, Rouen 1618, p. 988.

called curé of Chiré . . . gentleman and minister", whom a letter to Calvin shows to have begun preaching several years previously on his own initiative. After some controversy, and despite being censured for celebrating the marriage of a neighboring gentleman to his late wife's sister, the regional synod ultimately recognized him as a legitimate Reformed pastor. Another passage in the same work evokes a short-lived episode in the Beaujolais in which a local lord who would not long affiliate himself with the Reformed cause preached to an audience that included the parish *curé* and two other priests after the Huguenots briefly seized the area in the First Civil War. In Picardy in 1558, a letter from the Paris minister Jean Macard reveals, Jean de Poix, sieur de Séchelles, "presided" over the earliest gatherings of the faithful in Clermont and Luzarches, although what specific actions he took in that role--whether he led prayers, preached or even administered sacraments--is not specified.¹⁸ And at least one nobleman became a pastor on his own *terres* by following normative church procedures. Claude d'Arces, seigneur de Réaumont et Domène in Dauphiné, abandoned two comfortable clerical livings to flee to Geneva in 1559, studied and married there, then returned in late 1561 to his fief of Domène to serve as pastor of its church with the blessing of the Geneva Company of Pastors.¹⁹

Much more frequently, local lords initiated or participated in the creation of a new church and recruited a minister for it. Brittany was a province in which the aristocracy, both high and lesser, played a particularly important role in the growth of Protestantism, although the faith would never become strong there. The first preaching came under the protection of François d'Andelot, Coligny's brother, who brought two ministers with him and had them preach when he travelled through the province in 1558. Churches quickly formed in the two largest cities, Nantes and Rennes. Elsewhere, most of the church building over the next years was concentrated in chateaus and seigneurial towns. Even Rennes' church grew chiefly by winning converts from the petty nobility of the

¹⁸ [*Theodore Beza*], *Histoire ecclésiastique des Eglises Réformées au Royaume de France*: (Eds.) *G. Baum, Edouard Cunitz* [henceforward HE], Paris 1883-1889, Vol. 1, p. 846; Vol. 3, p. 508; *Guillaume Baum, Édouard Cunitz and Édouard Reuss* (Eds.), *Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, [henceforward CO], Brunswick and Berlin 1863-1900), Vol. 17, Col. 304, Vol. 19, No. 3728.

¹⁹ *Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod*, *Les députés des Églises réformées à la cour en 1561-1562*, in: *Revue Historique* 315 (2013), p. 327-328.

surrounding countryside.²⁰ Other regions where noble initiative seems to have been particularly important in the creation of Reformed churches include Lower Poitou, Saintonge (where a majority of the second estate seems to have embraced the faith²¹), much of Southwestern France, the uplands of Dauphiné and Provence, and Lower Normandy.

Scattered documents illuminate various roles played by noblemen in launching or advancing the creation of a local church. One revealing cluster concerns La Ferté-Frênel in Lower Normandy. The village lies about ninety kilometers to the southeast of Caen, where a church was formed in 1558 with two regents of the university (one a noble) acting as its first pastors. After the baron of La Ferté-Frênel, Nicolas de Hetteville, came into contact with Caen's church, he repeatedly urged its ministers to come preach on his lands. Despite the distance, one traveled there for six weeks in 1561 and laid the first foundations for a church. The baron then wrote to Geneva to get the church a minister of its own "inasmuch as God has given me power over many men, and because in this way one of the most superstitious regions of the country can be won to Christ". The Caen minister Jean Cousin also wrote, stressing that the baron was lord of eight parishes in the vicinity of his chateau and headed a household of eighty people. Geneva responded by sending the minister Claude de Creci.²² This is not the only case listed in the records of Geneva's Company of Pastors where a pastor was dispatched to serve a nobleman. In Dauphiné the powerful baron of Sassenage played a role similar to that of the baron of La Ferté-Frênel. He is probably the "baron of Dauphiné" listed in Genevan records as having requested and received a pastor in 1561. Two years later, in May 1563, the pastor of Grenoble Etienne Noël passed along word to Geneva that the baron was "making a diligent reformation of all his lands", but these were so extensive that he needed fourteen pastors to serve them. Noël's intervention was prompted by the fact that one of the two

²⁰ *Philippe Le Noir*, *Histoire ecclésiastique de Bretagne depuis la Réformation jusqu'à l'édit de Nantes*, (Ed.) *B. Vaurigaud*, Paris 1851, p. 5-31.

²¹ *Seguin*, *Histoire de l'Aunis et de la Saintonge* (cited note 15), p. 260.

²² HE (cited note 18), Vol. 1, p. 252; *Hippolyte Aubert* (Ed.), *L'Organisation des Églises Réformées de France et la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève*, in: *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme* [henceforward BSHPF] 46 (1897), p. 461-465; *Peter Wilcox* (Ed.), *L'envoi de pasteurs aux Églises de France. Trois listes établies par Colladon (1561-1562)*, in: BSHPF 139 (1993), p. 366.

ministers then serving Sassenage had just written to warn that the baron's wife and relatives were doing their best to lead him away from the true path. This made it urgent that Calvin himself write to exhort him to perseverance and send more trained preachers, Noël said.²³ Four other cases of ministers sent not to a locality but to serve a nobleman also appear in the lists of pastors dispatched from Geneva in late 1561 and early 1562. Ministers were sent to "the gentleman of Champagne" (perhaps Jean Raguier, sieur d'Esternay, to whose fief of La Motte de Tilly the Reformed of Provins, Bray and Nogent-sur-Seine all journeyed to worship in 1561²⁴); "the seigneur of Bettancourt" (Antoine de Nettancourt, seigneur de Bettancourt in Lorraine); "Monsieur de Solier" (lord of several communities in the Marquisat of Saluzzo²⁵); and "Monsieur de Montjoux (Jean de Forest dit de Vesc, sieur de Montjoux, "one of the leading gentlemen of the religion in Dauphiné"²⁶). On these same lists Creci was noted as having been sent simply to "La Ferté-Fresnel", which suggests that still other cases of ministers dispatched to serve noblemen lie hidden beneath the place names of which these lists are overwhelmingly composed.²⁷

Documents from the Provençal village of Mouans and the nearby town of Grasse reveal that after first taking pastors into their own households and having them preach in their chateaus, noblemen could then back their obtaining use of the parish church. In fact, only a fraction of the first French Reformed ministers were trained in or passed through Geneva. Many were formed as "*proposants*" or "*diacres cathéchistes*" in the larger urban churches inside the kingdom; it is also probable that some noblemen engaged preachers with evangelical leanings as household chaplains without these men having received any sort of formal training or ordination by the emerging network of Reformed synods. Roland de Grasse, baron of Bormes apparently obtained a minister through one of these

²³ *Joseph Roman* (Ed.), *Documents sur la Réforme et les Guerres de Religion en Dauphiné*, Grenoble 1890, p. 128; *Wilcox*, *L'envoi de pasteurs*, p. 354.

²⁴ *Claude Haton*, *Mémoires*, (Ed.) *Laurent Bourquin*, vol. 1, Paris 2001, p. 212; *Benedict and Fornerod*, *Députés* (cited note 19).

²⁵ HE (cited note 18), Vol. 2, p. 184.

²⁶ HE (cited note 18), Vol. 3, p. 303; *Roman* (Ed.), *Documents sur la Réforme en Dauphiné* (cited note 23), p. 40-41.

²⁷ Other requests of noblemen for pastors may be found in CO (cited note 18), Vol. 18, col. 731; *Aubert* (Ed.), *Organisation des Églises Réformées* (cited note 22), p. 458-459.

avenues. Just before Christmas 1561, he then summoned the Catholic curé and three syndics of the village of Mouans to his chateau and informed them that he wanted to have "his" minister preach the word of God in the parish church, since his residence could no longer hold all the people attending the assemblies. The consuls granted the request on condition that no church furnishings be harmed and ongoing Catholic services in the building not be disrupted. Slightly over a week later the baron had a notarized document drawn up recording this agreement and attesting that the sharing of the church had begun without disturbance.²⁸

Catholic sources also charge that Protestant lords used force to impel their tenants to attend Reformed services once they established them. Even Protestant histories admit that Charles Dupuy, seigneur de Montbrun, "tried by all means and forms of persuasion" to win his neighbors and subjects to the faith after a church took shape on his lands in Dauphiné in 1559 or early 1560. Catholic historians say he beat tenants into attending sermons and drove them off his lands if they would not join the church.²⁹ Strikingly, the undated letter in Geneva's archives, probably from late 1559 or early 1560, that requests a minister for Montbrun is signed not only by Dupuy-Montbrun, but also by thirteen other individuals identified as elders or deacons of what are presented as three distinct churches in the adjacent villages of Montbrun, Barret and Séderon. Did Dupuy-Montbrun have the power to force the inhabitants of three villages to establish consistories and sign on to his initiative, or might the request have arisen from a more widely shared desire for new order of services?³⁰ Whether the lord forced his tenants to sign this document or tapped into wider discontent with the established church, the newly established Reformed church of Montbrun unquestionably depended on its seigneur's presence and financial support. A

²⁸ Archives Départementales des Bouches du Rhône (Aix-en-Provence), B 3328, Fo. 714v-716v, with complementary documents illuminating the context Fo. 716v-718v. This is not the only known of a sort of *Simultankirche* agreement being worked out locally in France in these years.

²⁹ *Louis Regnier de La Planche*, Histoire de l'Estat de France, tant de la Republique que de la Religion: sous le Regne de François II, n.p. 1576, p. 475; HE (cited note 18), Vol. 1, p. 400; *Guy Allard*, Les vies de François de Beaumont, Baron des Adrets. De Charles Dupuy, Seigneur de Montbrun et de Soffrey de Calignon, Chancelier de Navarre, Grenoble 1671, p. 10; *Nicolas Chorier*, Histoire générale de Dauphiné, Vol. 2, Lyon 1672 repr. Valence 1869, p. 545.

³⁰ *Roman* (Ed.), Documents sur la Réforme en Dauphiné (cited note 23), p. 11-12.

pastor was found to serve the congregation, but in October 1560, following Dupuy-Montbrun's flight from the region and the razing of his chateau, its consistory wrote of the "desolation" of the church and released its new pastor because it was no longer able to maintain him.³¹ Another charge that Protestant nobles used force to push local villagers into Reformed worship comes from the bishopric of Luçon in Poitou, where Huguenot noblemen resisted the restoration of Catholicism decreed by the 1563 Peace of Amboise so vigorously that 39 parishes remained without services when the diocesan clergy complained about the situation in their bishopric a year later. According to their remonstrance, not only did these nobles allow "ministers of the new or so-called reformed religion" to preach publicly in their houses, in public marketplaces or even in parish churches; they "invit[ed] and even urg[ed] and forc[ed] those from all around to attend the sermons and sacraments administered in their fashion, even those who are not subject to their lordship."³² Similar accusations are made against Jean Raguier, sieur d'Esternay in Champagne by the Catholic memorialist Claude Haton.³³

However great the role of noblemen such as these may have been in establishing certain new Reformed churches and impelling souls to join them, noble initiative cannot be considered the most important trigger of the surge of church foundations between 1555 and 1572. Most early churches were established in cities. Even in the rural Beauce, where a quarter of all noble families ultimately embraced the faith, the key figures in the initial dissemination of the movement were most often clerical converts and town-dwellers.³⁴ For every request for a minister received in Geneva signed by a nobleman there are several signed primarily or exclusively by *roturiers*.³⁵ For every Provins or Nogent-sur-Seine, where a small number of urban converts had to travel to a nearby seigneurie to worship, there was a Le Mans, whose surviving consistory register shows

³¹ Bibliothèque de Genève, MS Français 402, piece 1, published in *Ibid.*, p. 25-26.

³² Charles Carrière (Ed.), Remontrances du clergé de Luçon en 1564, in: *Revue de l'Histoire de l'Église de France* 24 (1938), p. 463.

³³ Haton, *Mémoires* (cited note 24), vol. 2, p. 23-25.

³⁴ Constant, *Nobles et paysans en Beauce* (cited note 3), p. 329-333.

³⁵ For examples: Aubert (Ed.), *Organisation des Églises Réformées* (cited note 22), p. 456-458 (a letter signed by two noblemen, seven substantial peasants and nine men of unspecified status inhabiting nine villages in the vicinity of Sainte-Menehould in Champagne); CO (cited note 18), Vol. 18, No. 3468, 3511, Vol. 19, No. 3558, 3566, 3585, 3587, 3614.

upwards of 25 noble converts from the surrounding countryside attaching themselves to an urban church.³⁶ If coastal Bas-Poitou would remain a stronghold of rural Protestantism under noble protection down to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the best explanations of why other areas such as the Cévennes, Normandy's Pays de Caux, or the region of Moyen-Poitou between Niort and Saint-Maixent emerged as even more important centers of rural Protestantism accord as much or more weight to the presence of rural industry and important circuits of exchange with nearby cities.³⁷ Often, what ensured the successful growth and continuity of a local church was the ability of lesser noblemen to work in tandem with nearby urban residents. The first pastor of Saintes was partially maintained at the expense of the gentlemen of the surrounding areas whose manors he often visited to preach.³⁸ When a crowd attacked the houses of the first members of the church of Le Croisic, the faithful and their pastor took shelter in the chateau of Careil, belonging to Jean Du Bois (var. Du Bouays), sieur de Baulac.³⁹ The church of Périgueux assembled in the townhouse of Jean Daiz, sieur de Mesmy.⁴⁰ To return once again to the Beauce, churches formed here on the lands of Catholic lords as well as Protestant ones. Those protected by Protestant noblemen often drew just a small fraction of the local population.⁴¹ Early noble converts certainly pressured tenants to attend the Reformed services that they patronized, but the pressure did not always work, while ministers who preached in the countryside were delighted to find they could

³⁶ Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod (Eds.), *L'organisation et l'action des Églises réformées de France, 1557-1563: Synodes provinciaux et autres documents*, Geneva 2012, p. 178-253.

³⁷ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, Paris 1966, p. 349-351; Alain Molinier, *Aux origines de la Réformation cévenole*, in: *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 34 (1984), p. 240-264; Nicholls, *Social Change and Early Protestantism* (cited note 15), p. 289; André Benoist, *Les populations rurales du "Moyen-Poitou protestant" de 1640 à 1789. Économie, religion et société dans un groupe de paroisses de l'Élection de Saint-Maixent*, unpub. thèse de 3e cycle, Poitiers 1983, p. 224, 320.

³⁸ Bernard Palissy, *Recette véritable*, (Ed.) Frank Lestringant, Paris 1996, p. 215.

³⁹ HE (cited note 18), Vol. 1, p. 97; *Le Noir*, *Histoire ecclésiastique de Bretagne* (cited note 20), p. 12. For other instances of ministers sheltered in noble chateaux, see CO (cited note 18), Vol. 18, col. 717, vol. 19, cols. 103-105; Marcel Cauvin, *Le protestantisme dans le Cotentin : Hérenguerville – Trelly – Contrières*, in: BSHPF 113 (1967), p. 474 and n. 5.

⁴⁰ Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS Fonds Français 15875, fol. 407.

⁴¹ Constant, *Nobles et paysans en Beauce* (cited note 3), p. 329-30, 334.

spontaneously attract listeners from leagues around.⁴² All in all, the phenomenon of seigneurial Protestantism appears to have been less important in winning converts to the faith in France than it was in those parts of Austria, Hungary or Poland where the Reformation also attracted a significant fraction of the population. What undergirded the phenomenal speed with which Reformed churches multiplied in France between 1560 and 1563 was the capacity of the consistorial-synodal form of church organization designed at the national synods of 1559 and 1560 to bring together in a cooperative effort noblemen and roturiers and to furnish them with ministers trained in both Geneva and France affirming the same confession of faith.

Not that this system triumphed without encountering some resistance from noblemen who, having founded churches, expected to be able to control them, or at least to receive deferential treatment from them. In Brittany, where aristocratic leadership was so important in the initial establishment of the Reformed churches, the first regional assembly of congregations was not a provincial synod of pastors, elders and deacons of the sort specified by the national synod of 1559, but an assembly at the chateau of La Fonchaye convened by "several gentlemen and others having charge in the church" that adopted a system of ecclesiastical government controlled by an elected council of noblemen.⁴³ Synods worried that noblemen might operate churches without regard for their collectively adopted rules of discipline. Thus, the April 1561 provincial synod of Berry felt compelled to decree that noblemen could have ministers in their houses only so long as they were duly approved by the leadership of nearby churches and signed the church's confession of faith, just like all other pastors. The April 1562 national synod decreed that seigneurial churches must have consistories for church discipline like other Reformed churches, a decision reiterated by the 1563 provincial synod of the Ile-de-France, Champagne and Picardy.⁴⁴ At least one nobleman failed to comply with these injunctions, for the 1565 provincial synod of Brittany had to issue what was clearly a

⁴² CO (cited note 18), Vol. 19, col. 21.

⁴³ *Le Noir*, Histoire ecclésiastique de Bretagne (cited note 20), p. 37-38.

⁴⁴ *Benedict* and (Eds.), Organisation et action (cited note 36), p. 56; *Jean Aymon* (Ed.), Tous les Synodes Nationales des Eglises Reformées de France, The Hague 1710, p. 23-24; Rotterdam, Gemeentebibliotheek, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde, MS 404, p. 67.

second injunction to a minister preaching in the chateau of the comte de Maure to "submit to the general regulations (*police générale*) of the Reformed churches of this kingdom . . . as he promised to do".⁴⁵

Insofar as can be determined, however, noble resistance to the consistorial-synodal form of church government was ultimately modest. The elected council of noblemen decreed for Brittany at La Fonchaye gave way in less than a year to the province's integration within the consistorial-synodal network that had imposed itself throughout the rest of the kingdom. The problem of noblemen operating house churches without regard for the synodally-approved rules of church discipline attracted nothing like the degree of attention given to those whom the synods labeled "*coureurs*", ministers who set themselves up in a locality without obtaining proper approval from the pastors of the surrounding area. Glenn Sunshine's important account of the construction of Huguenot ecclesiastical institutions asserts that a large if unknown number of aristocratic house churches came into being that operated independently of the Reformed synodal network and its decrees. As evidence, he adduces the absence of representatives from such churches at most early synods.⁴⁶ In fact, the rare minutes of these assemblies that survive do reveal the presence of delegates from noble house churches, and there is reason to believe that these sources would tend to obscure just how many churches met on noble lands after 1563.⁴⁷ We have already seen that three separate consistories had been established in the vicinity of Montbrun before Dupuy-Montbrun requested a minister from Geneva.

⁴⁵ *Jean-Yves Carlier*, Deux synodes provinciaux bretons au XVI^e siècle, in: BSHPF 135 (1989), p. 339.

⁴⁶ *Glenn S. Sunshine*, Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557-1572, Kirksville MO 2003, esp. p. 146-147.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Fonds Français 17294, fol. 254, the minutes of the 1564 provincial synod of Berry, which notes the presence of ministers and elders from three churches identified as being "of the house" of a nobleman, as well as of delegates from Montargis. This last was the fief of Renée of Ferrara, but the document does not explicitly identify the church as meeting under her protection. More generally, many erstwhile urban congregations forced by the edicts of pacification from 1563 onward to assemble on noble lands continued to be identified by the name of their original location. Churches that met in seigneurial towns were also commonly identified by the town's name, not that of their noble patron.

More uncertain is the question of just what sort of concessions the French Reformed churches were willing to make to aristocratic sensibilities within the parameters of the consistorial-synodal system. Consistory records from the earliest years of the churches survive for only two congregations, Le Mans and Nîmes. In the first of these congregations, whose members included many gentlemen from the surrounding area and not a few town-dwelling nobles from the local judiciary, a quite striking adaptation was made to ensure that gentlemen would not suffer the indignity of being censured for misbehavior by their social inferiors: at the moment when the congregation was initially divided into territorial sub-units for the purposes of church discipline, a special "canton" was created exclusively for the *gens de justice* and noblemen of the surrounding region, all of whose elders also came from their ranks.⁴⁸ This was not done, however, in Nîmes, whose church also had many noble members. Which of these two models was more widely followed by other churches? We simply do not know. Nor have studies of consistorial discipline in France yet determined whether aristocratic misbehavior was treated with greater leniency in order to avoid offending key protectors.

The outbreak of the civil wars increased noble leverage within the Reformed churches. While the January 1562 edict of toleration permitted Reformed worship anywhere within the kingdom except within the walls of walled cities, virtually all of later edicts, beginning with the April 1563 Peace of Amboise, restricted worship to a tiny number of towns in most provinces and to the lands of noblemen possessing rights of high justice. Many urban churches consequently had to move their meetings to the land of a nearby lord. A significant number of small churches may only have managed to survive the difficult years from 1563 to 1598 because of the protection and financial support provided by men such as the seigneur de Tremilly in Champagne, who lodged the pastor of Vassy and the surrounding region in his house, provided his furniture, linens and tableware, and paid half of his salary.⁴⁹ Under such conditions, the minister and consistory of the church in question would surely have taken pains to retain the lord's good will. It seems telling that, in the immediate aftermath of the First Civil War, the colloquy of Aunis allowed seven local gentlemen to join its meeting by virtue of their

⁴⁸ *Benedict and Formerod* (Eds.), *Organisation et action* (cited note 36), p. 179, 186-188.

⁴⁹ *Leonard Chester Jones*, *Simon Goulart 1543-1628*, Geneva 1917, p. 361-371.

rank alongside the ministers and elders of the district who normally attended, while the churches of Dauphiné invited the nobility of each colloquy to send one representative to the next provincial synod.⁵⁰ Much remains to be learned, however, about the place of noblemen within Reformed churches that met under their protection. Finding and exploiting records that give insight into the inner workings of such churches is a priority for future research.

The consistorial-synodal system adopted by the Reformed churches vested authority over ecclesiastical affairs in the hands of pastors, elders and deacons, who met together in the local consistory and delegated individuals from their ranks to attend meetings of regional colloquies and provincial synods. Noblemen occupied a small but far from insignificant place within these three church ministries. In his pioneering study of Geneva and the coming of the Wars of Religion in France, Robert Kingdon assembled biographical information about a sample of 88 early pastors who passed through Geneva. Of these, 10 were unquestionably noble and 4 were probably so, yielding a total of 16 per cent if the probable cases are counted.⁵¹ A larger data base of ministers active between 1555 and 1563 that I am compiling currently contains 511 individuals, about many of whom I know little more than their name. Twenty-seven, or just over 5 percent, can be said with confidence to come from the second estate. The actual percentage of noblemen among early pastors probably lies somewhere between the two extremes of 5 and 16 percent revealed by these calculations. Among early pastors of noble extraction were not only Theodore Beza, but also such other leading figures as two guiding lights of the church of Paris in its early years, Antoine de Chandieu, seigneur de La Roche and Chandieu, from an old Dauphiné family with lordships in several provinces, and François de Morel, sieur de Collonges, from the Angoumois, as well as the theologian Lambert Daneau, whose father was a petty noble and financial official in the Orléanais.⁵² Noble

⁵⁰ Colloque de La Rochelle à Thairé (2 nov. 1564), in: BSHPF 44 (1895), p.473-474; *Ulysse Chevalier*, *Annales de la ville de Romans pendant les guerres de religion de 1549 à 1599*, Valence 1875, p. 35.

⁵¹ *Robert M. Kingdon*, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555-1563*, Geneva 1956, p. 6.

⁵² *S.K. Barker*, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest. The Vernacular Writings of Antoine de Chandieu (c. 1534-1591)*, Farnham 2009, p. 13-17; *Kingdon*, *Geneva and the Coming*, p. 6; *Paul de Félice*, *Lambert Daneau (de Baugency-sur-Loire) pasteur et professeur en*

representation within the eldership and diaconate of certain churches was modestly higher. Three of the 15 original members of the consistory of Buis-les-Baronnies (Dauphiné) were noble, as were 4 of the 16 original elders and deacons of Le Mans.⁵³ But in thirteen churches of the Midi for which Janine Garrisson-Estèbe was able to determine the social composition of the consistory, nobles occupied just five per cent of the places.⁵⁴

Members of the second estate occupied a far higher percentage of positions of military and political leadership within the cause. Indeed, this is where lesser noblemen would play the largest role in the story of the French Reformation, although nearly always, it must be stressed, in collaboration with members of the high aristocracy, of the clergy, and of the third estate. The first important moment of widespread Reformed political activism came during the short reign of Francis II (July 1559-December 1560), with the organization of a series of plots to seize control of the king, summon an Estates-General, and oust the house of Guise from its dominant position at court. The conspiracy of Amboise of March 1560 was the most notorious of these plots; it was not the only one, as schemes to seize important cities or move against the king continued into the fall.⁵⁵ The prince of Condé and several lesser grandees, leading ministers and intellectuals in Geneva, Strasbourg, Paris and Orléans, and prominent figures from a number of urban churches were all involved in these conspiracies. Nevertheless, most of those most active in the recruitment and leadership of the troops raised in connection with these movements came from the lesser nobility.⁵⁶ Even before these conspiracies, a petty nobleman of Provence, Paulon de Richieu, sieur de Mauvans, had assembled men from a number of

théologie 1530-1595, Paris 1882, esp. ch. 1; *Olivier Fatio*, *Méthode et théologie*. Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scolastique réformée, Geneva 1976.

⁵³ *Roman* ed., *Documents sur la Réforme en Dauphiné* (cited note 23), p. 115; *Benedict* and *Fornerod* (Eds.), *Organisation et action* (cited note 36), p. 179, 181.

⁵⁴ *Garrisson-Estèbe*, *Protestants du Midi* (cited note 3), p. 95.

⁵⁵ *Regnier de La Planche*, *Histoire de l'Etat de France* (cited note 29) reveals the full extent of these plots. See also *Lucien Romier*, *La conjuration d'Amboise*, Paris 1923, p. 215-248.

⁵⁶ The fullest list of captains of the Amboise enterprise is to be found in *Agrippa d'Aubigné*, *Histoire Universelle*, (Ed.) *André Thierry*, Vol. 1, Geneva 1981, p. 270-271. For more on leading noble conspirators, see *Arlette Jouanna*, *Le devoir de révolte. La noblesse française et la gestation des l'État moderne, 1559-1661*, Paris 1989, p. 134-139; *Daussy*, *Parti Huguenot* (cited note 1), p. 140-143.

churches in that province and begun a series of intermittent raids that would last for over a year. For the most daring of these, an incursion into the Papal Comtat Venaissin in August 1560, he joined forces with Dupuy-Montbrun, a kindred spirit from Dauphiné whose adventures will be recounted in more detail below.

Not long after these plots and raids fizzled out and the underage Charles IX ascended to the throne, the second national synod, held at Poitiers in March 1561, decreed that each synodal province should name deputies to represent its interests at court and coordinate actions between the provinces. These deputies would soon become key decision makers for the cause alongside and in consultation with the leading Paris ministers, the great Protestant champions at court, and Calvin in Geneva. The group as a whole was about equally divided between lawyers and nobles, with a few of the latter coming from families of the *noblesse seconde* with strong court connections, and the bulk from the ranks of lesser squires.⁵⁷

Just as the military aspects of the conspiracies of 1560 offered lesser noblemen a role particularly conducive to their training and values, so too did the decision of churches and synods over the course of the year 1561 to create military structures for their defense and, so they claimed, that of the crown. Since these units were instituted and approved by consistories and synods within whose ranks noblemen were typically a small minority, the establishment of these military structures should not be seen as a case of noblemen imposing their martial inclinations on an otherwise peaceful movement. Nor were the units thus established composed exclusively of aristocrats. Nobles were, however, understood to have a particularly important role to play within them. When the December 1561 synod of Sainte-Foy named two "protectors" of the churches of Guyenne, both came from the lesser nobility of the region. (One was the sieur de Mesmy, who had previously hosted Reformed services in his town house in Périgueux and been actively involved in the conspiracies of 1560.)⁵⁸ When, a month later, Le Mans' church set about creating its militia and determining how many armed men it could raise in case of need, the elders of the urban cantons were instructed to draw up lists of all able-bodied men in their neighborhood who could serve; the church's aristocratic members were

⁵⁷ *Benedict and Formerod*, Députés (cited note 19), p. 311-14.

⁵⁸ HE, Vol. 1, p. 888 and also, for Mesmy, Vol. 1, p. 290, 894-895, Vol. 2, p. 893, 943.

convoked individually and asked how many men they could furnish at their own expense.⁵⁹ When the First Civil War broke out a few months later, many soldiers for the Reformed cause were mobilized through this system. Most were ordinary town dwellers, but the three additional protectors known to have been named at this juncture were all noble.⁶⁰ In December 1562, with most of Dauphiné firmly under Protestant control, a Huguenot-controlled meeting of the provincial estates that can be considered one of the first Protestant political assemblies created two councils, one military and one political, to oversee the war effort. The military council was exclusively noble in composition. Three of the twelve seats in the political council were reserved for men of this estate.⁶¹

Throughout the subsequent civil wars, most of the captains who profited from the troubles to achieve the greatest renown and power continued to stem from aristocratic families, but the militarization of the localities promoted by thirty-six years of intermittent civil war also gave growing numbers of roturiers the opportunity to emerge as military leaders. As fighting became endemic in the regions most evenly split between the two faiths, the captains of small garrisons grew in both numbers and power. Half of those identified for the Rouergue between 1560 and 1600 (some 300 in all, both Protestant and Catholic) hailed from the third estate. In the Protestant-dominated small town of Die in Dauphiné, several generations of the Gay family earned a good living as silk drapers in times of peace and military captains in times of war.⁶²

The Protestant political assemblies that multiplied after 1573 on both the provincial and national level were likewise divided in composition between noblemen and town dwellers. Here, ministers also accounted for a significant minority of delegates. Janine Garrisson's analysis of the social composition of some twelve Protestant political assemblies reveals the following breakdown:

Nobles Bourgeois Ministers

⁵⁹ *Benedict and Fornerod* (Eds.), *Organisation et action* (cited note 36), p. cvii-cix, 186-188, 244.

⁶⁰ HE, Vol. 2, p. 976, Vol. 3, p. 78.

⁶¹ *Benedict and Fornerod* (Eds.), *Organisation et action* (cited note 36), p. 268, 273n.

⁶² *Sylvie Desachy-Delclos*, *Les élites militaires en Rouergue au XVI^e siècle*, in: *Annales du Midi* 108 (1996), p. 9-27, esp. p. 17; *Jules Chevalier* (Ed.), *Mémoires des frères Gay pour servir à l'histoire des guerres de religion en Dauphiné*, Montbéliard 1888, *passim*.

1. Five Supra-Regional Assemblies 1573-1588	51%	29%	20%
2. Seven Provincial Assemblies of Languedoc and Guyenne 1573-1597	33%	57%	10% ⁶³

The 1596 political assembly of the Protestants of Dauphiné was composed of three categories of representatives: nobles, of whom there were 27 (50%); pastors, of whom there were 12 (22%); and deputies of individual churches, 15 in total, of whom 6 were identified as "captains" (12.5%), 1 bore the honorific "sire" and hence was noble, and 8 bore the honorific "monsieur" and can be classified as bourgeois (18%).⁶⁴

The fighting during the first three civil wars was waged both locally and nationally. While some nobles fought in their home provinces, others rallied to the standard raised by the Prince of Condé, who assembled a large army of native French troops through networks of aristocratic clientage, via the militias attached to the churches, and by drawing upon foreign allies and mercenaries.⁶⁵ But not all noblemen who joined the Reformed church were prepared to take up arms for its defense. Stuart Carroll has recently underscored how significant a fraction of the very highest aristocrats who embraced Protestantism in the years of its initial expansion either remained neutral in the First Civil War or fought against the Association of the Prince of Condé. Over thirty years ago, Jean-Marie Constant showed that many lesser Protestant nobles of the Beauce abstained from fighting for the Huguenot cause.⁶⁶ Political or military engagement in the cause did not necessarily follow from membership in a Reformed church, even if the bridge from one to the other was built by the political and military initiatives taken by the churches' synods and deputies in 1561 and 1562, and ministers overwhelmingly urged

⁶³ *Garrisson-Estèbe*, Protestants du Midi (cited note 3), p. 205, 207.

⁶⁴ *Roman* (Ed.), Documents sur la Réforme en Dauphiné (cited note 23), p. 703-705.

⁶⁵ The fullest list of those who fought for Condé in 1562 is *David Potter* (Ed.), The French Protestant Nobility in 1562: The 'Association de Monseigneur le Prince de Condé', in: French History 15 (2001), p. 307-328, analyzed in *David Potter* "Alliance", "Clientèle" and Political Action in Early Modern France: the Prince de Condé's Association in 1562, in: *David Bates et al.* (Eds.), Liens personnels, réseaux, solidarités en France et dans les Îles Britanniques (XIe-XXe siècles), Paris 2006, p. 199-219.

⁶⁶ *Stuart Carroll*, 'Nager entre deux eaux': The Princes and the Ambiguities of French Protestantism, in: Sixteenth Century Journal 44 (2013), p. 985-1018; *Constant*, Protestant Nobility in France (cited note 4), p. 72.

believers to cross it.⁶⁷ In military and political affairs, as in the initial foundation of the Reformed churches, the key to such success as Protestantism had in France had arose less from the engagement of any one group, than from its ability to construct a church and affiliated political institutions that mobilized in a common cause believers of different social backgrounds. Great noblemen at court, lesser noblemen in the provinces, important leadership elements in the cities, ministers both in France and Geneva, and allies abroad all made essential contributions.

If there was one critical moment in the story of the French Reformation when members of the lesser nobility may have played a particularly decisive role in shaping the fate of the movement, that moment came just after the Saint Bartholomew's Massacre, the time of greatest peril for the cause. Not only did the massacre kill thousands; it provoked the flight or abjuration of tens of thousands, temporarily eliminated or neutralized the high Protestant aristocracy as a political force, and precipitated the interdiction and closure of Reformed churches nearly throughout the kingdom. But as Genevan onlookers despaired and Catholic militants exulted at what they believed to be the final elimination of the faith, armed resistance began in a few pockets of Protestant strength. Two groups led this resistance: lesser noble local military chieftains in upland areas conducive to guerrilla warfare, and opinion leaders, some also of noble status, in walled cities such as La Rochelle, Montauban, Nîmes, Sancerre and Millau, who convinced their fellow townsmen to close the gates to royal authorities and disobey the order to cease worshipping. As La Rochelle and Nîmes withstood long sieges, the captains of the upland areas gradually drew cowed Protestants back into open support for the cause and captured new citadels. Supra-regional political assemblies knit the isolated pockets of resistance into a larger whole that spoke for the cause. The contemporary history that best recounts this crucial but scarcely studied moment in the story of the Protestant cause, La Popelinière's *History of France*, fills much of a page with the names of the "leaders of the confederates in Languedoc and neighboring *pays*" in late 1573: Montbrun in Dauphiné,

⁶⁷ *Benedict and Fornerod* (Eds.), *Organisation et action* (cited note 36), p. lxxxiv-cxii; *Philip Benedict*, *Prophets in Arms? Ministers in War, Ministers on War: France, 1562-74*, in: *Graeme Murdock, Penny Roberts and Andrew Spicer* (Eds.), *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France, Past & Present Supplement 7*, Oxford 2012, p. 163-96.

the Vicomte de Gourdon in Haut Quercy, the Vicomte Lomaigne in Bas Quercy, the Vicomte de Caumont in the Pays de Foix, Chavagnac in the Gevaudan, and on and on.⁶⁸ Today, all of these men are obscure figures, even to specialists, although their memory would live on for centuries in the areas through which they rode and raided. They and the ministers and municipal leaders of towns such as Nîmes and La Rochelle were the key actors of the faith's recovery from the brink of disaster, a recovery that advanced so quickly that in 1576 the Reformed even briefly regained the freedom to worship anywhere the kingdom.

Reconstructing the biographies of all of these obscure captains would be a fascinating contribution to the history of the French Reformation. Here I can only look at the least obscure of them, Charles Dupuy, seigneur de Montbrun, whom we have already met several times in this essay, and who has the interest of having been involved in both the agitation of 1560 and the Protestant resistance after Saint Bartholomew. Dupuy-Montbrun descended from a noble family that first appears in Dauphiné in the thirteenth century. His father, who fought in the Italian wars, was lord of seven seigneuries, all tiny, totaling just 140 families of vassals and yielding revenues of only 400 livres a year. His mother, Catherine Parisot de La Valette, came from a more distinguished family; her uncle was a grand master of the Order of Malta. Born around 1530, Charles was initiated in arms at his father's side in the Italian wars, where he clearly imbibed the thirst to perform valiant acts against great odds so characteristic of his milieu. He too made an excellent marriage, wedding a great niece of the powerful Cardinal of Tournon whose dowry brought 8,000 livres but no additional land.⁶⁹

Charles embraced Protestantism soon after returning from Italy in 1558. His seventeenth-century Catholic biographer Guy Allard tells a story about his conversion that must have originated in Reformed circles. As the story goes, Montbrun learned on his return that his sister had embraced the faith and run away to Geneva. He set out after her vowing to catch and punish her, but when he got to Geneva and heard its preachers, he was so touched that he converted himself and became a lifelong champion of the faith.

⁶⁸ *Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière*, *Histoire de France*, Vol. 2, [La Rochelle] 1581, p. 191v.

⁶⁹ *Pierre-Henri Chaix*, *Promotion sociale et Réforme*. Charles Du Puy de Montbrun, in: BSHPF 121 (1975), p. 470-475.

On his return to Montbrun he demolished the chapel in his chateau, put an end to the mass in the parish church, and instituted Reformed preaching.⁷⁰ This pious legend may have been promoted by the family to put the best possible light on a somewhat more tawdry reality revealed by a previously unremarked set of entries in Geneva's consistory records. It seems that Charles's sister, Jeanne Dupuy-Montbrun, moved to Geneva in 1557 largely to escape her husband, Gaspard de Theys, seigneur de Clelles, a serial adulterer of a type that was anything but rare among the nobility of the era who in one instance "debauched" a woman in Valence, paid compensation to her family for having done so, brought her back home, installed her in the family chateau, and fathered at least one child by her. After Jeanne had had enough and decamped to Geneva, Clelles followed her there in November 1557 and urged her to return home. She refused and over the next seventeen months was able to accumulate enough testimony in support of her accusations of debauchery and adultery against him to convince the consistory to grant her a divorce. She then remarried a noble Italian refugee, Giulio de Thiene.⁷¹ If Jeanne's brother Charles came to Geneva after returning from Italy, it would have been amid this family drama. If he was attached to his sister, he could have seen her conversion as a liberation from a degrading situation and the Reformed church as an instrument for upholding his family's honor.

As we have seen, consistories soon formed in Montbrun and nearby Barret and Séderon, giving these communities the essential nucleus of a Reformed church. At some time probably late in 1559 or early in 1560, Charles signed a letter along with thirteen elders and deacons from the three communities requesting a pastor from Geneva for them. He probably also used his power over his vassals to force them to attend the church.⁷² He certainly quickly provoked a series of violent confrontations with the royal authorities of the provinces that would lead within a year to his own flight to Geneva and

⁷⁰ *Allard*, *Vies des Adrets, de Montbrun et de Calignon* (cited note 23) p. 8-9.

⁷¹ Archives d'État de Genève, Registres du Consistoire, Vol. 12, fo. 113v, 155v; Vol. 14, fo. 123v-124, 126v-127v, 155, 159v; Vol. 15, fo. 22v, 24, 25, 44, 50v, 56, 132v, 137; Juridiction Pénale, K1, entry of 2 February 1559. I owe deep thanks to Jeffrey and Isabella Watt, the editors of Geneva's consistory registers during Calvin's lifetime, for bringing these documents to my attention and furnishing me with their as yet unpublished transcriptions of them.

⁷² See above, p. xx.

the dissipation of the church of Montbrun. According to Agrippa d'Aubigné, who wrote at some distance from the events in question, Dupuy-Montbrun was the captain of the conspiracy of Amboise for Dauphiné.⁷³ There is, however, no evidence that he led troops to the Loire valley. Instead, he militated in his own province. In April 1560 he was one of the noblemen bearing arms who protected the minister François de Saint-Paul as he preached from the porch of the Franciscan church of Montélimar, an incident that brought down the royal wrath on all involved. He refused a subsequent summons to appear before the Parlement of Grenoble, and when a royal provost was sent to arrest him in July, a confrontation ensued: Montbrun knocked the provost off his horse; he and his retainers captured the provost and his archer; and the king's men spent several nights in the castle dungeon before being released. Now clearly an outlaw, Montbrun joined forces with the Protestants of nearby Provence and responded to a call for aid from co-religionists in the Comtat Venaissin by invading that papal territory and capturing Malaucène on August 7, bringing with him the pastor who had been sent from Geneva. Cities from Valence to Marseille were seized by fear that they would be attacked next. On August 21, the papal legate reported that Montbrun had occupied a third of the Comtat.⁷⁴ The lieutenant governor of Dauphiné, Hector de Pardaillan, seigneur de La Motte-Gondrin, finally negotiated a pact with the occupiers promising them immunity from prosecution if they withdrew from the Comtat, put down their arms, and decided within a month whether they would return to the Roman church or sell their possessions and emigrate to a place where they could practice their faith. In Montbrun's case, this pact broke down almost as soon as it was signed. According to Protestant sources, several of his men were killed by

⁷³ *D'Aubigné*, *Histoire Universelle* (cited note 55), Vol. 1, p. 271.

⁷⁴ *Jean Lestocquoy* (Ed.), *Correspondance des nonces Lenzi et Gualterio, légation du cardinal Trivultio (1537-1561)*, *Acta Nuntiaturae Gallicae* 14, Rome 1977, p. 251; *François Joubert and Salomon de Merez*, *Mémoires de divers événements en Dauphiné notamment pendant les guerres de religion*, (Ed.) *Edmond Maignien*, Grenoble 1886, p. 36-37; *Alexandra D. Lublinskaya, Tamara Voronova and Elena Gourari* (Eds.), *Dokumenty po istorii Frantsii serediny XVI v. nachalo religioznykh voyn (1559-1560)/ Documents pour servir à l'histoire de France au milieu du XVI siècle. Début des guerres de religion (1559-1560)*, Moscow 2013, p. 170-171, 180-181; *Regnier de La Planche*, *Histoire de l'Estat de France* (cited note 29), p. 474-497; *HE*, Vol. I, p. 400-414; *Marc Venard*, *Réforme protestante, Réforme catholique dans la province d'Avignon au XVIe siècle*, Paris 1993, p. 446-50.

priests or refused entry into their communities. He rallied his men again in retaliation and seized several small towns in Dauphiné, harming no one "except the priests". A much larger royal force was now sent to apprehend him, so he fled across the mountains to Geneva and Bernese territory, leaving his chateau to be destroyed in his absence.⁷⁵

Montbrun's movements over the next eighteen months are unclear, but if the *Histoire ecclesiastique* is to be believed, he was back in Dauphiné by April 1562 and rode into Valence in the company of three other leading Huguenot nobles just in time for the lynching of the royal lieutenant general who had previously tried to arrest him and had ordered the destruction of his chateau, La Motte-Gondrin.⁷⁶ This event announced the eruption of the First Civil War in Dauphiné. For the first eight months of the conflict, Montbrun was a key lieutenant of the man who took control of much of the wider region in the name of the king and the prince of Condé, the redoubtable baron Des Adrets. Des Adrets sent him to govern Chalon-sur-Saône when the Huguenots took that city in May, although he had to surrender it within a month when a much larger royal army approached. As "colonel of the companies raised in Dauphiné for the administration of the region in obedience to the King's majesty," he sent orders to the political and ecclesiastical officials of 24 churches and communities in the region of Montélimar in June ordering them to raise new troops on pain of death.⁷⁷ In July, a detachment of men he commanded was responsible for one of the most proudly advertised brutalities of the conflict, meant to strike fear in the enemy by showing the level of violence that the cause was prepared to use. In revenge for a prior Catholic massacre of Protestants of Orange, no quarter was given the surrendering defenders of Mornas when that fortress in the Comtat was taken. Those killed or captured were thrown from the promontory overlooking the Rhone on which the citadel was located. Their corpses were loaded into a boat that was released to float down the river carrying a sign speared into one body reading "O you of Avignon let these bearers pass without paying; they already paid the

⁷⁵ *Regnier de La Planche*, *Histoire de l'Estat de France* (cited note 29), p. 582-591; HE, Vol. I, p. 411.

⁷⁶ HE, Vol. 3, p. 303; Allard and Chorier place his return to Dauphiné slightly later.

⁷⁷ *Gabriel Brisard*, *Histoire du Baron des Adrets*, Valence 1890, p. 136.

toll at Mornas."⁷⁸ Montbrun continued to campaign in this fashion in close collaboration with Des Adrets for five more months. In December he was named to the military council created by the provincial Estates. When, soon thereafter, the Huguenots of Dauphiné became convinced that Des Adrets was about to sell out the cause and surrender, he turned against his former commander and led the mission to oust and arrest him. A second meeting of the provincial Estates confirmed his position in the military council.⁷⁹

The March 1563 Peace of Amboise brought the First Civil War to an end, but it took months before the Protestants abandoned all of the cities they controlled in the Southeast; Montbrun was among the Protestant captains who resisted the restoration of Catholicism for the longest. Ultimately, however, he put down his arms, returned to his *terres* and sponsored the reconstruction of the local Reformed church that had been dispersed in 1560. With the renewal of civil war in 1567 he took up arms again. He fought in both the Second and Third Civil Wars, participating in the great battles of Jarnac and Moncontour, then leading his men back to Dauphiné to continue the fight there in the mountainous terrain he knew so well. His daring crossing of the Rhone under the nose of the baron de Gordes en route is the subject of the last scene of Tortorel and Perrissin's pictorial account of the *Wars Massacres and Troubles of Our Times*. By 1570 he was the undisputed military leader of the Protestants of the province.⁸⁰

In the aftermath of the Saint Bartholomew's massacre, not a single urban church in Dauphiné dared to continue to assemble, and the local governor sought to ensure the loyalty of the Huguenot nobility as well. Montbrun would not submit. Going from chateau to chateau accompanied by several ministers, he gradually assembled enough men to begin in April 1573 to raid and pillage across the countryside, then to seize one after another the small towns and castles of Orpierre, Serres, Sahune, Condorcet, Nyons, Livron, Loriol, Dieulefit, Soyans and Chabeul. His exploits in holding off over 1500

⁷⁸ *Loy de Perussiis*, Discours des guerres de la Comté de Venayscin et de la Provence: ensemble quelques incidents, Avignon 1563, p. 56. Protestant historians assert that Montbrun did not order the killing but could not control his troops thirsting for revenge.

⁷⁹ *Benedict and Fornerod* (Eds.), Organisation et action (cited note 36), p. 268; *Brisard*, Histoire du Baron des Adrets, p. 73.

⁸⁰ *Allard*, Vies des Adrets, de Montbrun et de Calignon (cited note 23), p. 52-71; *Philip Benedict*, Graphic History: The *Wars, Massacres and Troubles* of Tortorel and Perrissin, Geneva 2007, p. 380-382.

Swiss troops with a relative handful of men reinforced his reputation for bravura. According to the great retailer of court gossip Brantôme, however, they also heightened a streak of independence that proved his undoing. When king Henry III commanded him to release some prisoners he had taken, he took offense at the tone of the missive. He was prepared to take orders from a monarch in peacetime, he reportedly told the king, but "in war when men have arms in hand and their fanny in the saddle, all are *compagnons*". The king did not forget his presumption. After Montbrun was taken prisoner two years later, he was expeditiously tried and executed; his property was confiscated, and his descendants stripped of their nobility.⁸¹ The military and political leadership of the nascent Protestant movement in Dauphiné passed to François de Bonne de Lesdiguières, another lesser nobleman from a family of more recent vintage destined for an even longer and more successful military career than Montbrun's that would ultimately lead him to the governorship of the province and a *maréchal's* baton.⁸²

As for Montbrun, he left behind a surprisingly positive reputation, especially after a clause in the 1576 Peace of Monsieur overturned his condemnation and rehabilitated his memory, allowing his family and descendants to recover their property and status.⁸³ Military derring-do and success washed away a multitude of sins in early modern France. A *cantique* set to the tune of psalm 43 published in 1576 sang the deeds of this "good servant of God and of the king of France", "the first to take up arms in Christ's defense and to raise troops against the great Antichrist". It called Montbrun humble, good-natured, humane, concerned only to advance the true religion, and "*si bon François*" that all "*vrais Daulphinois*" looked on him as a father.⁸⁴ In that same year the Huguenot

⁸¹ *La Popelinière*, Histoire de France (cited note 68), Vol. 2, fol. 108, 176, 193v-194; [Simon Goulard], Recueil des choses mémorables avenues en France sous le regne de Henri II, François II, Charles IX, Henri III et Henri IV, "Heden" 1603, p. 545-548; Chorier, Histoire de Dauphiné (cited note 31), p. 649, 651-670; Allard, Vies des Adrets, de Montbrun et de Calignon (cited note 23), p. 71-90; Pierre de Bourdeille de Brantôme, Oeuvres complètes, (Ed.) Ludovic Lalanne, Vol. 5, Paris 1884, p. 423-424.

⁸² On Lesdiguières' career and ascension, see Stéphane Gal, Lesdiguières. Prince des Alpes et connétable de France, Grenoble 2007.

⁸³ L'édit de Nantes et ses antécédents (1562-1598), electronic edition, Ecole des Chartes, <http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification>, Document 7, Article 35.

⁸⁴ Discours en forme de Cantique sur la vie et mort de Charles du Puy, seigneur de Montbrun et de Ferrassières, Gentilhomme Daulphinois, bon serviteur de Dieu et de la

historian Louis Regnier de La Planche brought out an account of his initial *prise d'armes* in 1560 that is a brilliant lawyer's plea for the innocence of a client that all of the evidence would seem to condemn.⁸⁵ The Catholic Brantôme praised the "brave" Montbrun as a "*bon et grand capitaine*".⁸⁶ A century later, when a local historian, also Catholic, set out to write the lives of the famous men of Dauphiné, Montbrun was the subject of one of his first lives.⁸⁷

This brief evocation of one lesser nobleman's contribution to the French Reformation puts some flesh and blood on the generalizations offered earlier on in this paper, but of course it also risks reinforcing an association against which that earlier portion warned, namely imagining the role of the lesser nobility in the French Reformation to be synonymous with military activity on its behalf. Elsewhere I have evoked another figure of the lesser nobility, Guillaume Roques, sieur de Clausonne, whose life course reminds us that lesser noblemen could serve the cause in other ways as well.⁸⁸ A lawyer and member of the urban nobility from Nîmes, Roques first appeared on a larger stage when he acted as a spokesman for the church of Nîmes when it sought rights of worship at the 1561 Estates of Languedoc. He also attended the Estates General of Pontoise. During the First Civil War he was one of two men sent from Languedoc to attend a meeting of the Protestant-controlled Estates of Dauphiné in order to finalize an alliance between the two provinces. In the course of the debate at Montélimar, his intervention proved critical to defeating a proposed peace agreement negotiated between the Des Adrets and Nemours. In 1567 he took part in the Michelade, the massacre of the city's leading Catholic political and ecclesiastical figures that followed the Huguenot takeover at the outbreak of the Second Civil War. When Nîmes vacillated about what to

Couronne de France, n.p. 1576. I would like to thank Mark Greengrass for furnishing me with a transcription of this work.

⁸⁵ *Regnier de la Planche*, *Histoire de l'Estat de France* (cited note 29), p. 474-497, 569-591. The index of this work contains an entry for "Mombrun gentil-homme dauphinois et ses faits heroiques".

⁸⁶ *Brantôme*, *Oeuvres complètes* (cited note 78), Vol. 5, p. 422, 424.

⁸⁷ *Allard*, *Vies des Adrets, de Montbrun et de Calignon* (cited note 29), *passim*, esp. preface.

⁸⁸ *Philip Benedict*, *French Protestants in the Service of the Crown, 1554-1612*, in: *Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich* (Ed.), *Jacques Bongars (1554-1612). Gelehrter und Diplomat im Zeitalter des Konfessionalismus*, Tübingen 2016, p. 9.

do after the Saint Bartholomew's Massacre, Clausonne was one of those whose urgings to ignore the royal order to cease worship and to forbid the king's lieutenant from entering the city swayed the city to embrace the path of armed resistance. He played an important role in the Protestant political assemblies of the next five years and finally was among the negotiators of the 1577 peace of Beaulieu that led to the establishment of the special bi-confessional tribunal in Castres, the so-called *Chambre de l'Edit*, of which he became co-president. No less militant than Dupuy-Montbrun, his service was chiefly oratorical, diplomatic and judicial. Of course, Theodore Beza's life could illustrate still another critical role that lesser noblemen played in the cause. In short, the roles of the lesser nobility in the French Reformation were as diverse as the group itself. They were one constituent part of a movement that had such success as it had because it was able to provide a common cause and common institutions for a creed that appealed to a committed minority within several different sectors of French society.

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