Were the Wars of Religion about Religion?

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William Cavanaugh’s *The Myth of Religious Violence* raises important questions about the role of religion in society. It challenges all-too-common misunderstandings about the relationship between religion and politics and, most valuably, warns against any assumption that religion is peculiarly prone to violence. This essay nevertheless takes issue with his attempt to disprove what he calls “the myth of religious violence” with evidence from the Wars of Religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe and his claim that “the story of these wars serves as a kind of creation myth for the modern state” (10). The essay emphasizes the importance of understanding the religious dimensions of early modern Europe’s wars but also of recognizing that, in both historical and contemporary situations, religious motivations are best understood not as independent variables but rather as catalysts that could exacerbate—or relieve—tensions rooted in other sorts of divisions or quarrels.

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William Cavanaugh’s *The Myth of Religious Violence* raises important questions about the role of religion in society. The book challenges all-too-common misunderstandings about the relationship between religion and politics and, most valuably, warns against any assumption that religion is “peculiarly,” or inherently, prone to violence (8). I agree with Cavanaugh on this and a number of other points but must take issue with his attempt to disprove what he calls “the myth of religious violence” in Chapter 3 of the book, where he argues that the term “wars of religion” commonly affixed to the conflicts that embroiled Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a misnomer and a particularly dangerous one because “the story of these wars serves as a kind of creation myth for the modern state” (10). I respond as a historian who has spent much of her career studying the Wars of Religion in France, the conflicts that Cavanaugh makes the focus of his critique, and disagree with his interpretation of both historical evidence and historiographical tendencies in the literature about the wars. My
broader purpose, however, is not just to set the historical record straight. More important, I want to suggest that William Cavanaugh’s approach here—his insistence that religion must be analytically separable from such factors as politics and economy if it is to be judged a causal element in the conflicts—cuts off scholarly analysis just at the point where it should begin. Rather than bracketing religious motives and setting them aside in analyzing quarrels in which religion plays a part, we need to pay close attention to their catalytic potential for exacerbating tension and sparking conflict in both historical and contemporary settings.

Let me turn, then, to the key historical question posed at the conference from which these essays derive, “Were the Wars of Religion about Religion?” The short answer is yes; they were about religion, but never solely about religion. Religion provided a fundamental—perhaps the fundamental—lens through which people understood their world in early modern times. It legitimated political authority, justified social hierarchies, and facilitated social order by establishing codes of right and wrong. Theologically based notions of natural order and the need to submit to God’s will helped people to cope with the problems of living in difficult and uncertain times. We cannot understand people’s behavior in early modern Europe without taking into consideration the religious beliefs that shaped their world view and mentality.

My understanding of religion is thus a historical one. I agree with William Cavanaugh that we should not seek a “transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion” (9) but rather look to understand how religious beliefs and practices influenced behavior in specific settings and times. I further agree that we cannot without anachronism “separate religion from politics, economics, and social factors” as a causal factor in the wars that repeatedly troubled Europe’s peace in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (11). And I agree that, to the extent that political theorists depict these wars as based solely on religious difference, or as wars of “all sects against all” (142), they are engaging in a reductionist and potentially dangerous sort of myth making, especially when they go on to claim that the solution to these wars was the primacy of politics over religion and the triumph of the secular over the sacred.

Where I disagree with Cavanaugh is how best to proceed from here. Most myths contain some element of truth, and as a historian I find it more useful to try to understand just how religion interacted with political and social factors in early modern times than to focus on demolishing what can easily be shown to be myth. Cavanaugh suggests in Chapter 3 of The Myth of Religious Violence that the impossibility of isolating the categories “religion,” “politics,” and “society” analytically—and therefore of identifying religion as the primary motivating factor in each and every part of the wars that occurred in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe—means that we must stop referring to this period as an age of religious wars. I cannot agree. Historical events are never monocausal, and attempts to reduce complex events to only one category of causes—whether political, social, economic, or religious—inevitably flatten their contours and distort them in untenable ways. Yes, the religious dimensions of the wars were complex and closely entwined with other causal factors, but that very
connectedness demands our attention. Rather than ignoring the role that religious motivations played in these events, we should be asking just how religious differences could act to exacerbate—or to relieve—tensions rooted in other sorts of divisions or quarrels. We need to understand religion not as an independent factor but rather as a catalyst that could heighten reactions and, given the right combination of elements, spark fundamental changes in the status quo.

Chapter 1 of *The Myth of Religious Violence* concludes with the observation that “we do not need theories about religion and violence, but careful studies of violence and empirically based theories about the specific conditions under which ideologies and practices of all kinds turn lethal” (56). In response to this call for more empirically, or historically, grounded studies of religiously sparked violence, this essay will ask why religious differences between Protestants and Catholics turned lethal in sixteenth-century France. It will be useful, however, first to offer a brief critique of the four components of “The Myth of the Wars of Religion” that William Cavanaugh says in Chapter 3 of his book must all be true for “the overall narrative to be true” (141).

The first component of the myth is the belief that “combatants opposed each other based on religious difference” (142). If this were true, Cavanaugh suggests, we would expect to find Catholics only killing Protestants and vice versa. First, and I will return to this point, the religious quarrels were far too complex to boil down to a simple opposition of Protestants to Catholics. But it is also important to understand that there was a lot going on in the period often subsumed under the label “Age of Religious Wars” besides wars of religion. In this respect, the term is akin to the label “Age of Enlightenment” often attached to the subsequent period of history. It is a sweeping characterization of a lengthy and complex era. The fact that some ignorant jurists and political theorists have mistakenly characterized the era in terms of “a war of all sects against all” is to me less a reason to do away with the label than an argument for promoting a better understanding of history.

I must also disagree with the idea that, if religion can be ruled out as “a significant factor” in some of these events, “the remainder of the acts of war—those between Protestants and Catholics—become suspect as well” (152). Cavanaugh overstates the extent to which historians disagree on the importance of religion in what he terms “the so-called wars of religion.” The writings he uses to illustrate the diversity of historical opinion over the role of religion in the French civil wars span nearly a century. During this time, the dominant modes of historical analysis changed dramatically, as first social and economic and then cultural history replaced political narratives focused on the deeds of “great men.” All but two of the books cited as examples of works that subordinate religious motives to political ones in France’s civil wars date from before 1975 and fit neatly into this general pattern of evolution from political narrative to economic and social histories that prioritize materialist motives over ideological ones as the fundamental drivers of history.

None of these histories dismiss religion as a factor in the wars. If they nevertheless prioritize social or political motives over religious ones, it is because their authors had a narrowly theological and institutional understanding of religion. They tended, for example, to interpret all of the Huguenot demands except the right to worship in socio-political terms. Distinguishing between “Huguenots of religion” and “Huguenots of state,” they believed that the former cause was subsumed under the latter once civil war broke out. They invoked a similar explanation when Catholics divided among themselves and later formed a Holy League to make war against a Catholic Crown. This narrow definition of religion changed radically in the 1970s, when historians adopted a cultural history approach and, incorporating insights from anthropology and sociology, asked new questions about the relationship between the sacred and the secular in early modern society. Almost without exception, historians working on the French religious wars today accept this broader definition of religion, reject the idea of a politics/religion binary, and attribute an important place to religious motives in the wars, even if they do not all assign exactly the same weight to these motives. As Philip Benedict put it in a recently published article, “That religious convictions shaped the politics of the later sixteenth century [in France] is now the prevailing orthodoxy in both French and Anglophone historical writing about the French religious wars.” Current writing is focused on asking not whether but rather “just how did religious belief beget violence and civil war?”

Before turning to this question, I need briefly to address the fourth premise of the myth, as Cavanaugh sees it: “The rise of the modern state was not a cause of the wars but rather provided a solution to the wars” (142). No historian would deny that European state building was a long-term and complex process, and most would agree that, at different times and in different ways, the Wars of Religion could be both a cause and an effect of the state-building process. In very summary terms, we might say that religious conflicts contributed to the formation of an independent state in the Netherlands, a federative empire in Germany, a constitutional monarchy in England, a colonial enterprise in Ireland, and an absolutist monarchy in France. Where I disagree with Cavanaugh with regards to state building is in his depiction of this process as primarily one of the state triumphing over the church. This oversimplifies the process by ignoring both the lesser secular authorities whose power was gradually curbed or appropriated and the collaboration between European rulers and the church that facilitated this extension of state power. Kings used the church to sanction and enhance their claim to rule as early as the fifth century, and the claim to rule by divine right became a staple of early modern monarchy. But European rulers also collaborated with


2 Philip Benedict, Prophets in Arms? Ministers in War, Ministers on War: France, 1562-1574. In: Murdock G, Roberts P, Spicer A, editors. Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France. Past and Present Supplement. 2012;7: 165. Stuart Carroll, The Rights of Violence, in Murdock, Roberts, Spicer, Ritual and Violence, p. 127-62, suggests that historians have recently tended to treat religion as too much of an independent factor in the Wars of Religion. Carroll is not, however, arguing for less attention to religious factors but rather wants to see more attention to relations between religion and politics and to the role of religion in the social environment. A similar point about the importance of understanding the connections between religion and politics is made in other contributions to the Ritual and Violence volume, but all affirm the importance of religion in shaping the politics of the era.
ecclesiastics in other ways, using them to administer lay properties, to provide education and charity to their subjects, and to convert their subjects and confirm them in the officially sanctioned religion. The concordats and pragmatic sanctions that Cavanaugh cites do not represent triumphs over the church so much as the negotiation of new terms of collaboration. If the king got certain rights of appointment, the church was nevertheless guaranteed both income and respect for its spiritual authority. I cannot agree, then, that we see here a “migration of the holy” from the church to the state or that “the emerging state appropriated the holy to become itself a new kind of religion” (11). Both statements, in my opinion, go too far and risk substituting a new myth for the one that Cavanaugh aims to deconstruct.

The religion/politics and church/state binaries are thus inaccurate and even deceptive when applied to early modern Europe. A more productive frame of reference places the sacred and the secular within a spectrum that extends from more spiritual to more worldly matters but encompasses both. Operating within the frame of reference that early modern people would have used, it avoids artificial distinctions between religion and politics and allows a more fruitful multi-causal analysis of events and their motives. The remainder of this essay seeks to illustrate the entwining of religious and non-religious motives in the violence that marked the so-called Wars of Religion in France, where civil war first broke out in 1562 and persisted intermittently until 1629.

William Cavanaugh is right to argue that the reality of the French wars is more “complex” than the simple pitting of “the Calvinist Huguenot minority against the Catholic majority” they are often assumed to have been (144). Recent scholarship has nevertheless shown that we cannot locate the origin of the wars in aristocratic quarrels and rivalries between noble grandees, as earlier generations of scholars often did, but rather must look to the tensions that grew out of religious divisions at the local level. Although generations of Protestant historians sought to portray the Huguenots as innocent victims of Catholic aggression by insisting that they wanted only the “right to recognition”—freedom of conscience and the right to practice their faith in peace—we now understand that Protestant militancy—what Philip Benedict has termed the “destabilizing and even revolutionary implications of France’s Protestant movement”—played an important part in the outbreak of war.

The rise of Calvinism in France represented a fundamental rupture in the Christian community, which had traditionally been taught to see itself as “one bread and one body” in Christ. Abstaining from the Mass at which this communion was

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5 Benedict, Prophets in Arms?, p. 164-5, is emphatic about this.
celebrated, French Protestants rejected traditional ways of experiencing divinity. They refused to accept the doctrine of the Real Presence, the sacramental authority of the clergy, and rituals and prayers through which divine protection was solicited on behalf of the community. If Protestants’ belief that God tells us to seek him through his Word alone caused them to reject the traditional church’s rituals and ceremonies, they did not simply trade divine immanence for transcendence but rather sought to redefine how the holy was present in the world. They found this new definition in scriptural assurances that Christian believers are themselves “the real temples of the Lord.”

The belief that God was present in the congregation gathered for worship caused French Protestants to separate themselves into closed communities of the faithful. This withdrawal from the broader community was due in part to Protestants’ desire to create a more godly society but was also the result of an involuntary expulsion. Luther’s teachings were condemned as heresy in France as early as 1521, and approximately 450 convicted heretics were executed in the country before heresy was redefined as sedition in 1560. The threat of persecution forced converts into the shadows, at least until the late 1550s, when the movement grew strong enough in certain areas to emerge publicly. This is when more overt—and violent—popular conflicts began. Using metaphors of gangrene or cancer, Catholic preachers encouraged their listeners to view Protestants as gangrenous members that needed to be severed from the social body in order to restore it to health. This rhetoric prompted acts of popular violence and attacks on Protestants caught coming and going from their suspected places of worship.

But the violence was not one sided. As their numbers and determination grew stronger, Protestants began to act out their hatred of Catholic errors in public acts of blasphemy and desecration. There was a didactic impulse behind these gestures. The iconoclast who knocked the head off a statue of the Virgin Mary wanted to show that the image was but an inert piece of stone; the blasphemer who seized the consecrated Host and stomped it underfoot wanted to show that it was only bread, a “god of paste.” From the Catholic perspective, however, these acts were an unbearable assault on the economy of the sacred. They put at risk the Virgin’s protection of the community and threatened to bring down the wrath of God. How could a community live in peace amid such danger?

At first only sporadic and semi-clandestine, Protestant acts of sacrilege and iconoclasm grew more public and spectacular as converts’ numbers increased and Reformed churches began to be organized in the 1550s. With their subsequent rapid growth in membership, Protestants sought to worship more openly. They began to carry arms for self-protection and also to seize churches in their areas of greatest strength. They justified this on the ground of their numbers, but of course

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Catholics did not see it the same way—especially when they began to whitewash walls and remove statues and side altars so as to adapt the buildings to their new purpose. From the Protestant perspective this was a necessary purification and removal of idolatry; from the Catholic point of view, there was little difference between the transformation of churches into Reformed temples and their outright sacking and pillaging. And, it must be said, an enormous amount of sacking and pillaging also occurred, especially after the first war broke out in 1562. In many cities seized by the Huguenots, cleansing the churches of “idols” was, after providing for the town’s defense, a top priority. In the words of Olivier Christin, “the abolition of idols thus represented a way of burning one’s bridges with the older order of things, a deliberate engagement in the irreparable.” We need only to remember the centrality of church buildings to the civic as well as the spiritual life of early modern towns to realize the symbolic value—and the corresponding psychological trauma—this seizure of churches entailed.

What might this tell us about “the specific conditions under which [Catholic and Protestant] ideologies and practices … turned lethal” (56)? It tells us first that from the Catholic perspective, the Protestant heresy threatened the natural order in which they understood both the sacred and the secular to dwell. It threatened the entire economy of the sacred—the lines of communication people had with the divine—but also imperiled the unity of the social body in a way that risked provoking God’s wrath. When clerics used their authority to preach and interpret the Word of God to cry out against these dangers, they enhanced the perception that violence was a legitimate and even necessary response to this threat.

But this is only one side of the story. From the Protestant perspective, the Catholic understanding of the natural order that God willed for his people was in its essence a flawed and idolatrous one—one that imperiled their immortal souls. A godly new society was needed, however disruptive its creation might prove to the status quo. Articulating these themes from the pulpit, Protestant ministers reinforced their followers’ sense of urgency, called on them to defend the gospel, and persuaded them that joining the struggle worked to accomplish God’s will. From both sides, then, the conflicts were framed not merely in civil but in cosmic terms.

This is not, I would stress, to say that religion has a unique tendency toward violence. Any ideology, religious or secular, that gives people a compelling vision of the natural order and convincingly articulates what must and must not be can be used to legitimate violence against those who refuse to share in this vision. The ability to speak in terms of absolute truths and to invoke fundamental threats to

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11 Benedict, The Dynamics of Protestant Militancy, makes a compelling argument about just how provocative the seizure of churches and acts of iconoclasm by French Protestants were in the period leading up to the outbreak of war in 1562.
14 Benedict, Prophets in Arms?, identifies a variety of responses to the outbreak of religious war in France but concludes that often “ministers emerged as partisans of uncompromising struggle… The civil wars, in their eyes, were nothing short of struggles to defend the true faith and its adherents against extermination” (p. 195).
the divine and natural order nevertheless constitutes a particularly potent rhetoric of persuasion.

I would also stress that religion did not operate alone here. The French Wars of Religion were not uniquely about religious differences. Aristocratic rivalries, ties of clientage, and more obviously secular concerns played an important and complex role in them. The admixture of secular and religious motives nevertheless served to render the conflicts particularly long lasting and deep rooted. This is evident in perhaps the most famous event in the wars, the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572. The massacre began with an attempt on the life of Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny. He survived the attempt only to become the first victim of a wave of killing that broke out two days later. Beginning with the Huguenot leaders, it eventually left two to three thousand victims in Paris and about as many more in other French cities. Exactly who ordered the assassination attempt has long been debated. Most explanations boil down to either factional quarrels or an act of jealousy on the part of the queen mother. The broader massacre can also be set down to political motives. The king later claimed credit for it as a preemptive strike intended to ward off a coup on the part of the Huguenots and prevent the outbreak of yet another civil war. This answer falls short, however, in explaining the extent and character of the popular violence that swept across France, for the killing claimed far more victims than the Huguenot leadership the king identified as its intended target. It also assumed a ritualistic character, with victims being forced to recant their faith, recite Catholic prayers, and attend Mass—acts that can only be explained in terms of the belief system that Catholic perpetrators believed imperiled by the presence of Protestants in their community. When word spread that the king was heard to say “kill them all,” people took this as a long-awaited opportunity to purge their community of a troubling presence. As Natalie Davis has shown, much of the popular violence in the French religious wars assumed ritual forms associated with purging or cleansing. Many of the “rites of violence” that Davis describes in her classic essay—destruction with fire and water but also the desecration of corpses and killing of babies still in their mothers’ wombs—characterize the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre and testify to its essentially religious character.

The impact of the massacre on French Protestants, who converted in large numbers in its wake, must also be explained in terms of religious beliefs and not just fear and intimidation. Although most recantations were forced and some were only temporary; others were permanent. For some, the massacre provoked a sincere crisis of faith. Perhaps, these Protestants thought, we are not God’s chosen people after all. The massacre also had an impact on Catholics that was not purely political, even among those so shaken by the killing that they advocated coexistence as the price of peace and were derisively labeled “politiques” by those

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15 From the enormous literature on Saint Bartholomew’s Day, I would single out Arlette Jouanna, La Saint-Barthélemy: Les mystères d’un crime d’État, 24 août 1572 (Paris: Gallimard; 2007), as the best recent study of these events and their significance. An English translation has recently been published under the title The St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre: The mysteries of a crime of State, translated by: Joseph Bergin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press; 2013).

16 See Davis, The Rites of Violence, on the ritual nature of religious riot and Diefendorf, Beneath the Cross, p. 92-106, on the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris.

17 Diefendorf, Beneath the Cross, p. 141-4.
who wanted to fight on to exterminate heresy entirely. Moderates or ultras, members of both parties considered themselves good Catholics. The only difference was the priority they were willing to place on the extermination of heresy.

My point here is that when we avoid asking about religious motives in the wars, simply because these cannot be neatly separated from other, complex causes of these events, we flatten them out, reduce them to one dimension, and fail to ask important and revealing questions. I want to illustrate this with a final example taken from the later stages of France’s religious wars when Ultra-Catholics formed a Holy League to make war against their Catholic King, Henri III, because he refused to set aside the legitimate claims of his Protestant heir. The wars of the League reduced France to near anarchy. Some of the worst of the fighting occurred in the southwest, in Languedoc, where armies of the Holy League waged brutal battles against royalist Catholics and their sometime Huguenot allies. Cavanaugh suggests that wars in which Catholics fought against Catholics cannot truly have been about religion (145–47). I would like to offer an alternative view, one that recognizes the fundamental role that religious beliefs played in the division of French Catholics into royalist (or politique) and Leaguer factions. I will use a single event to make my point.

In 1592 the Capuchin priest Ange de Joyeuse took off his sackcloth habit and placed himself at the head of the Leaguer army fighting to keep Languedoc out of the hands of the Protestant king who had inherited the throne 3 years earlier. Born Henri de Joyeuse, Father Ange was a member of one of the most powerful aristocratic families in Languedoc, indeed in all of France. He was a favorite of King Henri III but abruptly renounced court life after his wife died in 1587 to join the new and ascetic reformed Franciscan order of Capuchins. He was called back to secular life when his brother, who was leading the League’s forces in Languedoc, died in the wake of a battle against the royalist forces of the family’s chief rivals, the Montmorencys. Father Ange’s only remaining brother, a cardinal and Archbishop of Toulouse, insisted that it was Ange’s responsibility to take up the family’s military tradition and lead the League to victory in Languedoc.

Family ambitions and aristocratic rivalries thus provide a partial explanation of Father Ange’s decision to exchange his Capuchin habit for armor and a sword. But how impoverished is our understanding of this act if we overlook the religious context in which it took place. The campaign to get Father Ange to take up the sword began with an assembly of Toulouse’s most prominent theologians and canon lawyers. They debated for 7 hours before deciding that “given the obvious danger the people ran of falling under the domination of the Constable of Montmorency and being infected with heresy,” it was necessary for Father Ange to leave his religious order and put himself at the head of the League’s troops.18 (Montmorency was a moderate Catholic; it was his willingness to serve a Protestant king to which we owe the accusation of heresy.) The same theologians

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18 Bibliothe`que franciscaine provinciale des Capucins de Paris, Ms. Recueil chronologique des choses qui concernent la fondation et le progres de la Province des Capucins d’Aquitaine, ou de Tolose. Fait par le Commandement du R. P. Emanuel de Beziers provincial de la mesme Province, en l’anne´e 1694, p. 46.
and canon lawyers then went to the Capuchin friary where Ange was staying, “accompanied by the local nobility and followed by an immense crowd of people.” Ange initially resisted their pleas and agreed only after they convinced him that it would be a mortal sin for him to refuse to leave his cloister in order to “prevent such a great temporal and spiritual evil [to] befall the Catholic religion and state.”

The Capuchin chronicle that recounts these events tells how, after securing a promise that he could return to his order once “neither Religion nor the State had further need of him,” he was carried off to the cathedral by the crowds who “filled all of the streets of the city.” There he took off his Capuchin’s habit, dressed in mourning for his fallen brother, and went into the church where the cardinal belted on his sword in the presence of the city’s highest magistrates and “all of its nobility,” proclaiming him Duke of Joyeuse, governor of Languedoc, and lieutenant for the very king he was about to fight against. The chronicle concludes by attributing this all to the hand of God, for no sooner had Ange/Henri taken off his habit than he was transformed from a reclusive friar into an aggressive warrior. Rallying his army, he drove Constable Montmorency into retreat. He continued to support the League until Henri IV not only converted but was absolved by the pope. He then faithfully served this king until peace was made in 1598, at which point he laid down his sword, put on his religious habit, and lived the ascetic life of a Capuchin friar for the remainder of his days.

It is impossible to isolate political from religious motives in this story. Ignoring its religious dimensions nevertheless impoverishes the story and obscures the meaning contemporaries gave to it. Reasoning in terms of God’s will was not limited to uneducated or common people. Everyone—including aristocratic elites—weighed their course of action in this light, although perhaps not as deliberately as Father Ange did as a Capuchin friar whose life was consciously framed by his determination to do the will of God. The imperative to understand just how participants reasoned is a good lesson to apply to any conflict in which religion is involved—even marginally. Evaluating attitudes and behavior within a spectrum that encompasses the sacred and the secular avoids the anachronistic application of our own ideas about the relationship between (or separation of) these two spheres to those who do not share these same assumptions.

A better understanding of the religious dimension of the Wars of Religion in turn reminds us of the importance of understanding the power of rhetoric rooted in claims to know and do God’s will. Who can claim to speak in God’s name in a given time and place, and how might this authority be wielded? The pulpit is perhaps the most obvious place from which such claims could be disseminated. We cannot, however, isolate these modes of thinking within the clergy. Consider, for example, Claude de Rubys, a civic official and historian of Lyons, who blamed the spread of plague in the city in 1577 on the Huguenot poisoning of wells. Anyhow
familiar with medieval history will recognize here the accusation that resulted in
the Jews being driven from many European cities—and sometimes burned alive in
their synagogues—in the fourteenth century. Understanding how these tropes
survive and get attached to new enemies is an important task for scholars seeking
to understand religious violence.

Finally, we need to learn from the many places and occasions when religious
difference did not lead to violence in early modern Europe. Important new work is
being done on religious coexistence and the conditions that fostered de facto
tolerance among people who nevertheless believed that members of other faiths
were infidels or heretics. Benjamin Kaplan has taught us how “fictions of privacy”
promoted peaceful coexistence while still allowing for a dominant and state-
approved church. In a study of the Loire valley town of Saumur, Scott Marr has
shown how people lived peacefully with neighbors of different religions by
learning to separate their civic and religious identities. This is quite different
from the erroneous assumption that religious identities had to be sacrificed, or
subsumed under, civil or political identities in order to assure the triumph of the
secular state.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the agenda that William Cavanaugh sets
out in Chapter 2:

Instead of searching...for the timeless, transcultural essence of religion...let us ask why
certain things are called religions under certain conditions. What configurations of
power are authorized by changes in the way the concept of religion—and its
counterpart, the secular are used? What changes in practices correspond to changes in
these concepts? (119)

As I hope to have shown with examples from the French religious wars, these are
big questions whose answers can tell us a lot about how religious teachings can
promote values conducive to either peaceful coexistence or internecine war.

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Emmanuel de Beziers. Recueil chronologique des choses qui concernent la fondation et le progrès de la Province des Capucins d'Aquitaine, ou de Tolose. Ms. of the Bibliotheque franciscaine provincial des Capucins de Paris.


Rubys C de. Discours sur la contagion de peste qui a este ceste presente annee en la ville de Lyon, contenant les causes d'icelle, l'ordre, moyen et police tenue pour en purger, nettoyer et delivrer la ville. Lyon: par Jean d'Ogerolles pour Michel Jouve; 1577.

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