Separated by Death? Burials, Cemeteries, and Confessional Boundaries in Seventeenth-Century France

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The study of religious coexistence is only starting to catch up with work on religious violence in early modern France.¹ Violence appears so inevitably the result of religious divisions that coexistence seems startling. Yet recent work has shown that it was not exceptional.² De-


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² This comment refers to the study of coexistence in French biconfessional communities. Philip Benedict has explored the question in “Un roi, une loi, deux foi?: Parameters for the History of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France, 1555–1685,” in Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (New York, 1996), 65–93. Examples of coexistence in sixteenth-century communities can be found in Marc Venard, Réforme protestante, réforme catholique dans la province d’Agenon au XVIIe siècle (Paris, 1995), 539, 765–77, 1037; Olivier ChriStin, La paix de religion: L’autonomisation de la raison politique au XVIIe siècle (Paris, 1997), 103–34; and Wanegffelen, Ni Rome ni Genève, 307–29. The shift away from confessional violence in the period 1572–85 has been explored by Philip Benedict, Rouen during the Wars of Religion (Cambridge, 1981), 240–46; and Crouzet, Guerriers de Dieu, chap. 14. For the seventeenth century, the work of Elisabeth Labrousse has been crucial in exploring local coexistence. Her ideas are described in “Une foi, une loi, un roi? La révocation de l’Édit de Nantes (Paris, 1985), chap. 4. See also Robert Sauzet, Contre-réforme et réforme catholique en Bas-Languedoc: Le diocèse de Nîmes au XVIIe siècle (Louvain, 1979), chap. 5; and the important recent work of Gregory Hanlon, Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine (Philadelphia, 1993). Hanlon, in particular, has signaled the lack of attention to the study of coexistence (see his introduction). Confessional coexistence has also received much attention in Germany. For two examples, see Etienne François, Protestants et catholiques en Allemagne: Identités et pluralisme, 1648–1806 (Paris, 1993); and Paul Warmbrunn, Zwei Konfessionen in einer Stadt: Das Zusammenleben von Katholiken und Protestanten in den südwestdeutschen Städten (Münster, 1997).
spite long years of rivalry and bloody conflict, Huguenots and Catholics living in confessionally mixed communities intermarried, sponsored each others’ children at baptisms, worked together, shared civic responsibilities, and participated in each others’ observances. Sometimes they also buried their dead in common cemeteries.

This crossing of the confessional divide in matters concerning the dead seems all the more surprising given that in the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, and in the memory of those wars nurtured by polemists on both sides, corpses and cemeteries became focal points for some of the most bitter strife. Catholic rioters desecrated Protestant bodies. A 1597 “Plaintes des églises réformées” charged that Catholic authorities and royal courts allowed, even ordered, Huguenot remains to be disinterred and reburied or sometimes just thrown by the roadside. Protestant rioters, in their turn, dug up and burned remains that Catholics considered sacred. Catholic writers, such as the Jesuit Louis Richeome, complained that Huguenots during the Wars of Religion were “relentless in pursuing the bones and graves of the dead. [They] demolished thousands of tombs . . . out of pure animosity. . . . [They] disinterred the bodies of saints and disturbed their bones’ rest.” “Was this,” he asked, “a means of reforming the living by disinterring the dead and clowning around [bouffoner] over their ashes or playing with their remains?”

Historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis and Denis Crouzet have explained such violence as rituals in which each religious group ensured its purity by attacking the pollution emanating not only from living heretics but also from their dead. Confessional violence, as they describe it, grew out of a cultural gulf between the religions that widened as each impressed upon its faithful its rival’s radical difference.
But an examination of funerals and cemeteries suggests that another history is possible. Evidence from confessionally mixed communities indicates that burial grounds could be areas of local cooperation and that the funeral practices of the two groups sometimes resembled each other. This study focuses on the seventeenth century because the evidence of cemetery sharing and ceremonial similarities is more plentiful for that period than for the Wars of Religion. The Edict of Nantes (1598) established a political and legal context for coexistence and provided a government-sponsored means for Catholics and Protestants to negotiate local cooperation. But it also made Huguenots dependent on royal authority. When, eventually, the monarchy’s policy shifted from encouraging peace to pursuing persecution, no place would be left for Huguenot burial practices or cemeteries within confessionally mixed communities.

I have focused this study largely on the Poitou, an area in which cemetery sharing was widespread. My concern is to explore the different ways communities constructed confessional boundaries through cemeteries and to demonstrate these processes at work by analyzing illustrative examples. Although systematic examinations of burial practices and cemetery sharing are not available for other parts of the country, I have supplemented the Poitevin cases with others drawn from different regions. Documentation from outside the Poitou remains limited, but it does show that cemetery sharing was not just a Poitevin phenomenon. For both the Poitou and other areas, many sources provide information on burial practices. These include synodal legislation, consistorial records, memoirs, royal ordinances, and works by Catholic and Protestant polemicists, particularly Jean Filleau’s *Décisions catholiques* and Elie Benoist’s *Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes.* For cemetery sharing and separation, I rely on similar sources but also on communal documents and on lawsuits brought before provincial or parliamentary courts. Most of these sources are partisan; they reflect the aims of those

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6 Christian Desplat does provide some limited quantitative evidence of common cemeteries in Béarn in “Sépulture et frontière confessionelle: Protestants et catholiques de Béarn (XVI–XVIIe siècle),” Centre d’études du protestantisme béarnais, 9, *Revue de Pau et du Béarn* 23 (1996): 67–75. I thank Professor Amanda Eurich for providing me with this article.

7 Jean Filleau, *Décisions catholiques ou recueil general des arrests rendus dans toutes les cours souveraines de France en exécution, ou interpretation, des edits, qui concernent l’exercice de la religion pret. reformée...* [sic] (Poitiers, 1668); Elie Benoist, *Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes contenant les choses les plus remarquables qui se sont passées en France avant & après sa publication...*, 5 vols. (Delft, 1693–94). The issues of burials, cemeteries, and treatment of the dead were of central concern in both works, but they were not simply counterparts. Filleau, a magistrate and member of Poitier’s Company of the Holy Sacrament, compiled his collection as part of his ardent anti-Protestant campaigning. Benoist, a minister living in exile, wrote from the post-Revocation experience of having seen that campaign succeed.

8 The documentation is found in a variety of locations: the Archives nationales (AN) series
caught up in lawsuits or polemical battles. Even agreements or contracts between Protestant and Catholic neighbors that speak of “friendship” and “union” cannot always be taken at face value. We should not, however, ignore partisan sources in examining questions of coexistence. Polemical works such as those of Filleau and Benoist are useful because they reproduce verbatim material from lawsuits and legislation and because they present the convictions against which those who sought coexistence struggled.

The Construction of Confessional Boundaries

In places where Catholics and Protestants lived together, a pragmatic interest in avoiding conflict contributed to a cooperative atmosphere. Bob Scribner described this attitude in Germany as the “tolerance of practical rationality,” in which “ordinary people . . . made little fuss about difference in belief.”9 Scribner’s definition characterizes coexistence in France too, but more was involved than a reluctance to be caught up in the bloody conflicts of churches. What also encouraged coexistence were the shared concerns of Protestants and Catholics for communal harmony, kinship ties, familial honor and advancement, economic necessity, and the exercise of local power. These considerations could lead people to construct confessional relations in ways contrary to those their clergy sanctioned.10

Communities drew religious boundaries in at least three ways. First, the borderline could be blurred if people differentiated themselves less by religion than by other social distinctions: rank, privilege, and occupation. When parents of one faith chose for their children godparents of the other, or when families of different religions joined their offspring in marriage, the sense of different confessions did not disappear, but it did seem less important than social alliances and familial interests. This indistinct boundary was apparent in the way Protestants often disregarded a funerary practice fully in accord with Calvinist doc-

9 Bob Scribner, “Preconditions of Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth-Century Germany,” in Grell and Scribner, Tolerance and Intolerance, 32–47, see 38.
trine and instead sought a ceremony more akin to that of their Catholic neighbors. And the sharing of cemeteries, important elements of local identity, signaled the religious minority’s continued membership in confessionally mixed communities.

In contrast to this relatively indistinct separation, a clear demarcation could delineate the position of each group so that the very reinforcement of boundaries “contributed to the conditions that made possible the continued existence” of the minority in communities. Consider the militia companies assembled in certain towns of the Poitou in the 1620s, a time of renewed religious war. The militias had strictly equal numbers of Catholic and Huguenot members and officers, integrating both groups into the community by stipulating carefully the place of each in an important civic institution. The companies did not efface religious difference; indeed, they underscored it in enumerating the militiamen of both faiths. This sort of boundary, which acknowledged confessional difference, is apparent also in communal decisions to share cemeteries through their partition into two adjacent burial grounds. The careful articulation of space made it possible for both groups to secure their place in the community.

Maintaining boundaries could thus distinguish the groups without necessarily implying rejection and exclusion. But a clearer confessional definition could lead to a third form of boundary, as each church sought to differentiate itself from the other and to impose more orthodox standards of belief and observance. The Catholic Reformation worked to instill in its faithful practices carefully controlled by the clergy. Huguenot pastors and consistories also tried to hold their flocks more strictly to Calvinist doctrine. Neither campaign was entirely successful, but the state policy of separating the two groups under the Edict of Nantes’s provisions could encourage each faith’s self-definition or confessionalization. Such a development helped con-

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11 David Nirenberg, Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 228. Nirenberg treats the relations between minority Jews and Muslims and majority Christians in medieval Spain, but his notion of rituals, which both keep religious groups separate and integrate them into communities, opens possibilities for thinking about the boundaries constructed between religious groups elsewhere.


13 The literature on the Counter-Reformation in France is large, but see, for example, Keith P. Luria, Territories of Grace: Cultural Change in the Seventeenth-Century Diocese of Grenoble (Berkeley, Calif., 1991); and Philip T. Hoffman, Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500–1789 (New Haven, Conn., 1984).

14 On Protestant confessionalization, see Hanlon, Confession and Community, 255–57; and Philip Benedict, The Huguenot Population of France, 1600–1685: The Demographic Fate and Customs of a Religious Minority (Philadelphia, 1991), 103–4. Confessionalization has received a great deal of attention from German historians. The resulting bibliography is far too long to list here, but in
struct a discriminatory, confessional boundary that broke the bonds between neighbors of different faiths by invoking the old fears of social contamination. Huguenot cemeteries and temples were expelled from towns and cities, thus symbolically depriving Huguenots of their membership in communities. 15 Only conversion to the majority faith assured readmission.

We cannot think of these three possibilities as succeeding each other in rigid chronological sequence. Different types of boundaries could exist simultaneously. For example, neighbors of different faiths might divide cemeteries, thereby constructing the second form of boundary. At the same time, they might blur the confessional division through intermarriage, creating a boundary more like the first type. Nonetheless, the overall direction toward discrimination is clear. The third form of boundary eventually triumphed everywhere, but in some communities it appeared quite early. The Catholic clergy worked hard to restrict Protestant practice. They often found allies in the judicial system, especially in the parlements. In the years after Henry IV’s death in 1610, they sometimes gained legal victories separating cemeteries or otherwise harassing Huguenots. But the state did not mount a concerted anti-Protestant campaign until the 1630s, after the final round of religious warfare. The campaign waned during the years of the Fronde, but efforts to create the third, persecutory boundary intensified from the late 1650s to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and beyond. The overall chronology of the French state’s persecution of the Protestants, especially under Louis XIV, is well known. 16 What has attracted much less attention is how the construction of the first two
forms of boundaries blunted confessional hostility and allowed local people of different faiths to live together.

**Under the Edict of Nantes**

The Edict of Nantes sought to allay tensions and prevent violence over the dead by ordering royal officers "to see to it that no scandals are committed at funerals."\(^{17}\) It commanded also the separation of the two groups' cemeteries. But the application of the edict was contentious because it existed in two versions: one the king signed in April 1598, and the other the Parlement of Paris ratified in February 1599. The two versions were not identical, since the Parlement refused to agree to certain provisions of the original document and changed the wording of others.\(^{18}\) Huguenots saw the unratified document as more favorable and insisted on its validity; their Catholic opponents held to the Parlement’s version, and Henry allowed the court’s alterations to stand.

Article 28 dealt with the separation of cemeteries by dictating that “for the burial of the dead of those of the said religion . . . our commissioners . . . will promptly provide them with the most convenient place possible. And those cemeteries that they formerly held but that were taken from them during the troubles will be returned to them.”\(^{19}\) Protestants claimed that the original version of the article also included the provision that if royal officers delayed or avoided giving Huguenots new cemeteries, it would be permissible for them “to bury their dead in Catholic cemeteries in cities or places where they possess them and to do so until they are given their own.”\(^{20}\) The Assembly of the (Catholic) Clergy had insisted on dropping this clause. The “secret” or “particular” articles appended to the edict to regulate details (and which parlements did not ratify) ordered that no one would be prosecuted for Huguenot burials in Catholic cemeteries before the edict, thus preventing the Catholic clergy from any further disinterment of Huguenot remains and from purifying contaminated cemeteries.\(^{21}\) But the Catholic

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\(^{17}\) This was from article 29, which also ordered them to grant Huguenots new cemeteries within fifteen days of a request and prohibited officers from exacting any payment for conducting corpses to burial. See the text of the edict in Catherine Bergeal and Antoine Durrleman, eds., *Protestantisme et libertés en France au 17e siècle de l’Edit de Nantes à sa révocation, 1598–1685* (Carrières-sous-Poissy, 1985), 11–51, see 24.


\(^{19}\) Bergeal and Durrleman, *Protestantisme et libertés*, 23–24.

\(^{20}\) The text can be found in Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1862), 353; and in Jacqueline Thibault-Payen, *Les morts, l’église, et l’état: Recherches d’histoire administrative sur la sépulture et les cimetières dans le ressort du parlement de Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1977), 162.

\(^{21}\) Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1862), 149–50.
clergy would not stomach further profanations, the Parlement agreed, and Henry acceded to the change. Huguenots complained about the Parlement’s changes and the confusion over the provision of separate cemeteries. If the royal commissioners did not furnish them with new burial grounds, they could be left “not knowing where to bury their dead, except in places and in a manner both extraordinary and scandalous.”

The edict was also vague about how the new Protestant cemeteries were to be financed. Article 28 stipulated that Huguenots would receive new burial grounds “for free.” Henry assured them that in practice that proviso would mean that they did not have to pay for new cemeteries themselves; entire communities would bear the expense. Henry’s guarantees were eventually swept aside in the courts. Avocat général Jacques Talon, relying on the ratified version of the edict, argued before the Paris Parlement in 1622 that Henry had never intended to permit Protestants to continue burials in Catholic cemeteries, and he insisted that they were to pay for their own new burial grounds. The Parlement favored Talon’s arguments, which provided the basis for much of the later jurisprudence on the financial issue.

Given the uncertainties over the edict’s meaning and the king’s intentions, much of the law’s effectiveness depended on its interpretation and application. Thus its effect on the construction of confessional boundaries through cemeteries and funerals varied in different places at different times. Although the edict aimed at establishing peace, it did not seek to blur confessional identities or undermine religious difference except in the indeterminate long term, when all would be joined in one faith. In principle, therefore, the edict did not allow for the first type of boundary. Nevertheless, during Henry’s lifetime, royal commissioners in some places allowed continued Protestant burials in Catholic graveyards if communities could not pay for separate ones, resulting in precisely the sort of communal religious situation in which confessional boundaries remained blurred. In other places, commissioners sponsored agreements that divided cemeteries, providing for a clear but not exclusionary separation. This situation corresponded to the sec-


23 For Talon’s arguments, see Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 283–95. On Talon, see Thibaut-Payen, Morts, 162 n. 206, 170.

24 See Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1862), 354; Thibaut-Payen, Morts, 162, 164; and Desplat, “Sépulture et frontière confessionnelle,” 73–74. A 1606 royal response to the grievances of the Protestant deputy general seemed to support the Huguenot claim that the king’s intention was to allow them to continue sharing Catholic cemeteries until they were provided with new ones. Benoist, Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes, 1: 287–89, 436.
ond form of boundary, and it rested on the interpretation of the edict that Protestant leaders found most reasonable. Each faith would be given its place within local communities. For Catholic anti-Protestant campaigners this interpretation was unacceptable. They promoted a harsher one that would result in a stricter boundary, ostracize Huguenots, deny them an accepted place in communities, and compel their conversion.

Whatever the manner of its application, the edict had this important effect: it positioned Protestants as a carefully regulated group within French society. Royal law and policy structured the exercise of Protestantism as much as Calvinist doctrine itself did. Government decisions, however, had to contend with local peoples’ own constructions of the confessional border. The enforcement of state policy necessarily depended on the practicalities of communal life and the cultural dynamics that impelled local Catholics and Huguenots to a continual negotiation of their confessional identities.

**Burial Beliefs and Practices**

Catholic and Protestant dogmas disagreed profoundly over both rituals for interring the dead and beliefs concerning the fate of souls. These disagreements make similarities in funeral ceremonies all the more surprising. Protestants rejected the Catholic doctrine of purgatory and the variety of intercessory practices it spawned, such as masses for the dead, testamentary almsgiving, and indulgences. For Catholics, the souls of the dead in purgatory remained closely connected with the living. Those who could afford it willed money to the poor who, in turn, prayed for their benefactors’ souls. Family members paid for masses aimed at speeding the release of their relatives’ souls from purgatory. City men joined confraternities that saw to the decent interment of their deceased brothers and the saying of memorial masses. The urban and rural poor procured such benefits as they could afford, and they too felt a close contact with the dead through the observance of All Souls’ Day in parish cemeteries (popularly thought to be the physical location of purgatory). The dead constituted, in Davis’s words, “a kind of ‘age group’ to put alongside the children, the youth, the married, and the old.”

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neglect or circumstance, then the ghosts of the deceased were likely to haunt their survivors.

Calvinist belief held that the soul was saved or damned immediately upon death. Costly rituals aimed at rescuing souls from purgatory were thus mere superstition that increased the power and riches of the clergy. The Genevan Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541 held those who carried bodies to the gravesite responsible for ensuring that no “superstitions contrary to the word of God” occurred. Calvin had also objected to the elaborate funerals by which Catholics honored the dead of wealthy families and satisfied their survivors’ taste for social distinction. All souls were equal and all human remains were equally insignificant. Pierre Du Moulin, one of French Protestantism’s leading seventeenth-century theologians, put the matter succinctly: “We don’t fleece [tondons] people for burials.”

The Discipline of the French Reformed Church dictated a very minimal funeral ceremony: “To avoid all superstitions... no prayers or preaching will be offered nor public alms given at burials. Those who accompany the body will be exhorted to conduct themselves with modesty during the funeral procession, meditating... as much on the miseries and brevity of this life as on the hope for a happy life. So that mourning... remains heartfelt, the faithful will... reject all ambition, hypocrisy, [and] vanity.” To discourage any belief that linked the soul’s fate to ritual practice, the Huguenot funeral would be austere and testify to the confidence born of placing one’s fate entirely in God’s hands.

More than the Discipline, however, dictated simplicity and severity in Huguenot funerals. The Catholic state also regulated them, prohibiting daytime burials and limiting the size of corteges. And despite their


30 See, for example, the “Déclaration du roi du 2 avril 1666 qui règle les choses que doivent observer ceux de la r.p.r.,” articles 13 and 14, in Bergeal and Durrleman, *Protestantisme et libertés*, 92.
doctrine’s insistence on simple funerals, French Protestants resented the state’s restrictions; they claimed that under different political conditions, Calvinist funeral practice was not always so constrained. As Parisian minister and theologian Charles Drelincourt complained:

[Catholics] mock us because of our lack of ceremony and pomp, and this mockery has led to an infinity of disorders and inhumanities . . . but where our religion has full liberty, burials are not conducted as they are in this kingdom, where the misery of the times obliged our fathers to practice this simplicity. There are places where pastors deliver a public discourse for the consolation of the afflicted; they take the occasion of the death to exhort those present to live well in order, one day, to be able to die well. This is a holy and praiseworthy custom.31

In these comments, Drelincourt was certainly not longing for baroque, Catholic-style funerals; Calvinist ministers in France and elsewhere consistently urged austerity. Instead, he was complaining about the political conditions under which Huguenots lived. Nevertheless, he suggested that different political circumstances could lead to less, not more, spartan funerals, as practice did not always correspond to doctrine. Evidence from areas with dominant Calvinist churches indicates he was right. In Scotland, the Reformed Church fought long and not very successfully against the burial of the socially prominent inside churches. For Calvinist ministers, this practice was a superstition, a survival of the custom of burying the privileged near altars and relics, thereby speeding their souls’ release from purgatory. The Dutch Reformed Church allowed church burials, satisfying itself with eliminating funeral processions and sermons. Funeral feasting and bell ringing also continued in some Dutch cities and rural areas.32

But the comparison most directly on Drelincourt’s mind was between the Protestant situation in France and in German Calvinist localities, particularly Heidelberg, where he had passed some of his youth. The German situation also suggests that where Protestantism was politically dominant, funeral practices could vary considerably from the doctrinal norm. Although German Protestants, both Lutheran and Calvinist, wanted to ensure that funerals would instruct people in proper living rather than encourage them to pray for the souls of the dead, Lutherans nonetheless included Bible readings, prayers, canticles, bell

32 Old customs could be explained in new ways. The Reformed Church of Utrecht allowed bell ringing as a means of expressing communal grief rather than as a reminder to pray for the dead. Spicer, “‘Rest of Their Bones,’” 170–76.
In principle, German Calvinists rejected all of these practices, but they often resisted the absolute simplicity their pastors sought. Drelincourt remembered hearing mourners gracefully singing the canticle of Moses, a practice he applauded since it “excellently presented the fragility of human life and the brevity of our days.” Families often insisted on funeral sermons; for a minister to refuse them was a humiliation. Some Calvinist principalities even encouraged sermons by regulating their themes. Use of the *commendatio animae* continued even though Reformed churches rejected it (no commendation was necessary if the soul was immediately saved or damned). And despite ministers’ objections to recounting the deceased’s life at a funeral, the practice spread, at first among the aristocracy. Indeed, everywhere the rich continued to seek funerals more elaborate than local consistories allowed. It might seem that the close alliance between state and church in these Calvinist principalities would insure more, not less, conformity to doctrine, but difficulty in enforcement, the weight of custom, the pressure of elites on pastors and consistories all worked against conformity.

In France, Huguenots were more likely to be held to simple funerals by doctrine and the need to distinguish themselves from majority Catholics, but also, and perhaps more significantly, by the state’s restrictions. Nonetheless, even in France, the sought-after simplicity was not so easily obtained. Here the reason lay not only in the laxity of enforcement, but in the particular situation of the minority. Huguenots were seeking to maintain customary practices that fostered continued good relations with the majority, maintained integration and a public presence within communities, and perhaps continued ties with ancestors, even those of the other faith. In German Calvinist areas, state and church were allies in a not-very-successful struggle to impose doctrinal conformity. In France, the state and Protestant clergy were bitter opponents, especially as the monarchy mounted its campaign of persecution. They worked, with different goals in mind, toward breaking the bonds of easy familiarity between neighbors of different faiths. While ministers sought to establish a more disciplined confessional group, the state wanted to isolate the religious minority.

Descriptions of funerals suggest that even if Huguenots never de-

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manded burials as elaborate as those of Catholics, they still expected some ceremony and display. Faced with requests from provincial delegations to allow for local customs, national synods found it difficult to insist on simplicity. For instance, the question of whether ministers should be present at funerals proved troublesome. In principle, they were to attend only as friends or relatives of the deceased. Some synods discouraged their presence in a pastoral role as a means of preventing any hint of excessive ceremony; others left the decision to individual pastors. In some areas ministers were accustomed to giving funeral “remonstrances,” if not at the cemetery, then in front of the deceased’s house. The 1596 Saumur meeting would not agree to these exhortations, which resembled funeral sermons, but the 1603 Gap synod responded to a request from the Bas-Languedoc by saying that ministers there were to use their discretion. In 1631 at Charenton, deputies from Normandy reopened the issue, seconded by those from Burgundy, who pointed out that such sermons could serve as public polemics against Catholics. The minister of Béziers insisted that Catholics held Protestants in contempt because they did not give exhortations, and he added that many of the faithful were also offended by the lack of funeral sermons. His concern, in other words, was not to combat religious rivals but to avoid imposing an obligation on the faithful that marked them out in a humiliating way from their Catholic neighbors. The synod decided to leave alone those provinces that practiced the custom while prohibiting any new ones from taking it up.

Synods worried about “papist ceremonies” slipping into burials. For example, it was a widespread practice to exhibit the deceased in front of their houses before carrying them to the cemetery. The ringing of bells during funeral processions continued in some areas, despite the complaints of provincial synods that the practice was superstitious. Even the funeral procession itself was controversial. It could stand as a rebuke to Catholics if corteges marched as the Discipline required, with mourners including only relatives and friends of the deceased, dressed in black, marching two by two with a meditative air, first the men (perhaps with the consistory elders leading) and then the women. But apparently this rule was not always followed, and synods

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36 Calvin had been hostile to funeral sermons. Not only did they smack of ceremony, but since priests had traditionally received payment for sermons, the rich benefited from them more than the poor. See Vogler, “Législation sur les sépultures,” 202. The Scottish Book of Discipline (1560) forbade sermons because they opened the way to social distinctions in funerals. Rowell, Liturgy of Christian Burial, 82; Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, 138.
37 Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1863), 144–45.
38 Félice, Protestants, 1: 249–72.
were caught between local custom and the desire to restrict processions. The 1637 Alençon meeting decided that “without permitting the introduction of any new custom regarding funeral corteges, for the consolation of the families of the deceased . . . the Company permits to those which have long had their own form and practiced it with edification to continue to observe their own order.”

Evidence from the south suggests that synods were correct in fearing that local customs merged Protestant and Catholic practices. In Nîmes, Robert Sauzet has found that the baroque funerals so popular among the wealthier Catholics of the Midi were also attractive to Huguenots. Provincial synods complained that people insisted on being buried in tombs that displayed family coats of arms. Consistories condemned the use of large retinues, paid mourners [pleureuses], and ornate tombstones. Likewise they disliked having corteges of wives carry the bodies of wives, children carry children, and unmarried women carry unmarried women. The 1601 national synod of Gergeau had condemned as a “novelty” the flower garlands Languedocian women wore while accompanying the deceased to the cemetery. The synods also worried about pastors who, instead of resisting questionable ceremonies, sometimes participated in them. These practices seemed to Sauzet to be newly introduced among the Protestants, rather than older survivals.

The most frequent contraventions of Calvinist simplicity came from members of the Huguenot elite, who sought funeral pomp commensurate with their social status. When the great were buried, the Discipline’s rules were most likely to be frustrated, for instance on the issue of funerary monuments. Although cemetery walls did sometimes carry biblical inscriptions, the Discipline discouraged tombs and tombstones. But synods had to wrestle again with local custom and with the Huguenot elite’s assertion of their status. At the 1603 Gap synod, the delegation from Saintonge asked if it were permissible to have decorated tombs elevated on pillars. The assembly responded that “for tombs each should maintain the simplicity of ancient Christianity without appropriating for himself anything in particular, but should give evidence of our communion with the saints in death.” Social distinc-

40 Sauzet, Contre-reforme et reforme catholique, 74–75. On Languedoc corteges, see Félice, Protestants, 1: 258–59, 263–64. Synods did allow craft guilds to carry their former members to the grave. On women wearing flowers while carrying deceased women, see Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1863), 144.
41 Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1863), 143–47.
42 Ibid., 145.
tions after death were precisely the sort of Catholic “abuse” from which Calvinists sought to distinguish themselves.

The problem of funerary display was most acute in the Parisian Huguenot community, since the capital was home to high-ranking Protestant nobles and officials. For example, the funeral and the grave of Claude Arnauld, buried in 1603, was certainly in keeping with his important position as a financial officer of the crown and with the rising reputation of the Arnauld family. A procession with fifty horses accompanied the carriage that brought his body to the Huguenot Saint-Pères cemetery. His tomb, consisting of a large black marble slab with an engraved epitaph listing his official positions and praising his virtue, attracted much comment. It was, wrote memoirist Pierre L’Estoile, “a new and unusual thing among those of the religion.”

Perhaps such an innovation was not so surprising in a prominent and confessionally mixed family such as the Arnoulds. But it provoked resentment, and not just among Arnauld’s coreligionists. Two or three weeks after the tomb’s construction, it was covered in plaster for fear, according to l’Estoile, that it would become a target for Catholic crowds. During the period between the tomb’s construction and its plastering, the Gap synod decided against allowing raised and ornamented tombs. The efficacy of the decision is questionable, however, given that seven years later the Charenton consistory (which governed the Parisian Protestant community) had to order the dismantling of other tombs in the Saint-Pères cemetery “that various people have set up there, since they serve nothing other than to reintroduce papist ceremonies and superstitions.” Calvinist simplicity was hard to maintain when it conflicted with the status-conscious sensibility of family honor.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Protestant funerals or cemeteries closely resembled Catholic ones. Nonetheless, L’Estoile’s comment about Arnauld’s tomb suggests an awareness among observers that strict synodal regulations were being bent in the service of other interests. The confessional boundary Protestant authorities tried to erect in funeral matters was porous. This sort of slippage between Protestant expectations and Catholic practices could upset sensibilities in both camps. Protestant synods and consistories were not alone in complaining about the problem; Catholics did as well. A 1633 ordinance

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44 Pannier, Eglise réformée de Paris, 398.

45 Quoted in Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1863), 147. See also Félice, Protestants, 1: 269–70.
of the conseil d’État, which divided a mixed cemetery in Loudun (Poitou) into Catholic and Protestant portions, accused the Huguenots not only of burying their dead with Catholics, but also of imitating them in building “raised sepulchers, epitaphs, and inscriptions.” In this cemetery the practices of Loudunais Catholics and Huguenots were hard to distinguish, a concern for consistories and synods worried about papist intrusions but also for Catholic authorities eager to build a more rigid boundary between the confessional groups.

The anti-Protestant campaign constructed this boundary partly by eliminating the similarities between the religious practices of the Huguenots and their Catholic neighbors. Forcing Protestants to live not only within the Discipline’s strict bounds but also within the state’s more severe restrictions created barriers between the confessional groups. This aspect of the campaign became increasingly apparent after mid-century, when the monarchy began to respond readily to the urging of the Catholic clergy and their allies that the Edict of Nantes be applied in the harshest way possible on all matters concerning the Huguenots. The campaign’s scope is evident, for example, in Jean Filleau’s enormous compilation of anti-Protestant laws and court cases, Décisions catholiques. The range of issues Filleau’s volume addressed is vast, but a sizable part of it is devoted to burials and cemeteries. He targeted specifically the similarities in funeral practices:

Our time has seen with astonishment the enterprise of those of the R.P.R. [religion prétendue réformée] who, having denied all the ceremonies of the Church, nevertheless want, in some fashion, to imitate them by conducting their dead in the middle of the day [to the cemetery], with a great assemblage of people, marching in order, and what is more, by displaying bodies before the doors of their homes, in the form and manner of Catholic practice. . . . This new enterprise is full of presumption and condemned by the “arrests” that permit this religion, or rather irreligion, to exist in France only by the tolerance, indulgence, and kindness of our kings. Their dead . . . should be buried only in the darkness of night because the exterior honor rendered to the dead should belong only to those who have a legitimate right to it by professing the true faith.

For Filleau, Protestantism’s danger lay not only in its rejection of Catholicism, but in its hypocritical imitation of the true faith. Protestants thus appeared not as a threat from the outside but, more in-

46 AN TT 250, pièce 39 (29 Nov. 1633).
47 Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 299. On Filleau and more generally on the legal works he and others, such as the Jesuit Bernard Meynier, published to promote a more intransigent anti-Huguenot policy, see Labrousse, “Une foi, une loi, un roi?” 129–30.
sidiously, as one from within. Rooting them out required restricting them to funerals that were differentiated from those of Catholics; held to the letter of their own law, Huguenots’ essential dissimilarity from true believers would be made clear. The monarchy, whose “tolerance”—which is to say sufferance—of the heretics had allowed them to blur the boundary between the confessional groups, now would have to enforce a stricter division between them.

The government fulfilled such wishes with legislation that proved more effective than the rulings of consistories and synods in regulating Protestant funerals. According to the royal declaration of 1666 (reinforcing a 1663 arrêt of the council of state and various local ordinances), Huguenots could no longer display their dead before their houses, nor could ministers make funeral exhortations “in the streets.” In seigneuries where Huguenot nobles had a right to private worship, burials could take place only at dawn or dusk and no more than ten people, all friends or relatives of the deceased, could attend. Elsewhere, Protestant funerals could be held, from April through September, only at 6:00 a.m. or 6:00 p.m. precisely, and from October through March at 8:00 a.m. or 4:00 p.m. Corteges, consisting of relatives only, would be limited to thirty.48 Huguenots objected to these requirements, claiming they gave funerals a furtive air.49 In the Poitevin town of Melle, the elders of the consistory had tried to organize a protest of the 1663 arrêt on burial times with Huguenots in neighboring communities. No evidence exists of their success, but perhaps that was because local Protestants simply were not following the council’s decision anyway. Local compliance is difficult to assess. Certainly Filleau, admittedly not an objective observer, complained to the council in 1663 that disobedience was widespread in the Poitou and asked it to reinforce its prohibitions.50 Such complaints may have led to the more sweeping and precise 1666 declaration.

There was, however, a certain irony in a policy of harassment that intensified the strictures placed on Protestant worship. In a sense, the government was enforcing the Protestants’ own doctrinal preference for simplicity in funerals, though admittedly going further than even the strictest consistory. The lack of public ceremony in a burial at dawn or dusk, with no display of the deceased, no ministerial exhortation, and a limited number of mourners, all helped ensure the Calvinist re-

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49 Pannier, Eglise réformée de Paris, 383.
50 ADDS 2J 35 (1), p. 7 (Melle consistory, 18 Feb. 1663); Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 305.
jection of purgatory and honor paid the dead. In the words of the Protestant historian Paul de Félice, “a great silence would reign at burials.” The “Discipline had found an auxiliary more powerful than it.”

In funerals, as in other aspects of daily life, the state, seconded by the Catholic clergy and perhaps unintentionally by Protestant authorities as well, worked to break the communal bonds between people of different faiths. Where they succeeded, the third form of confessional boundary, the most exclusionary one, obtained. But legislation was often difficult to enforce. Perhaps one reason was that within towns and villages a sort of communal religion existed in which burial customs were, strictly speaking, neither “Catholic” nor “Protestant,” but “local.” Thus Protestants were not simply adopting Catholic ceremonies, they were responding to social imperatives—cementing communal bonds, meeting kinship obligations—by the continuation of traditional ritual behavior. Such rituals provided a means to cope with death and with the breach it caused in a community’s social fabric.

Given the state of current research into this question, the suggestion must remain speculative. But at the least, people of each faith were well aware of the other’s funerary practices and participated in them. Since the confessional line often ran right through families, people of one faith inevitably participated in the rival religion’s ceremonies. Even the Protestant Discipline despaired of preventing the faithful’s presence at Catholic funerals, instead allowing them to attend if they avoided all idolatry and superstition: they could not enter the church, they could only follow the procession at a distance, and they could not go to the meals that followed the burial. Consistories faced cases such as that of Marthe Brun of Melle, who, in 1665, participated in the funeral cortege of her deceased Catholic husband. She repented and was readmitted to the Cène. In 1673, Isaac Maigneron apologized to the Melle elders for having attended the Catholic funeral of one of his daughters. The consistory acknowledged his repentance and admonished him not to do it again. By themselves these two cases do not indicate a widespread problem for the authorities of the Reformed Church, but they do sug-

51 Félice, Protestants, 1: 257.
52 The provisions of one law often required repetition in subsequent ones. The 1666 declaration repeated the 1663 arrêt of the council, and some of the provisions of the 1666 declaration were repeated in another declaration of 1669. Bergeal and Durrleman, Protestantisme et libertés, 99–109.
53 In Andrew Spicer’s words: “The difficulty which the Reformed Church had in coping with this fear of death was reflected in the area of burial, where past customs and superstitious practices survived even amongst the faithful and devout” (“Rest of Their Bones,” 168).
54 Félice, Protestants, 1: 267–68.
56 BSP, 1500/6/c, p. 83 (Documents Maillard, Melle consistory, 7 Apr. 1673).
gest what consistories were up against in confessionally mixed communities. What real force could admonitions such as those to Brun and Maigneron have, when not only their neighbors but also their kin were of the opposite faith? Strict separation in death was difficult to achieve given the lack of separation in life, as an examination of cemeteries—literally common ground—will show.

Cemeteries

Cemeteries displayed physically the ways communities defined the confessional boundary. Doctrinal opposition should have led to strict division of burial grounds. But the picture was more complex, as neighbors of different faiths set aside dogmatic differences and negotiated their confessional relations through their cemeteries.

For Calvinists, the notion that cemeteries were sacred ground hallowed by the bones of the faithful was just another example of Catholic superstition. We are, wrote Elie Benoist, “not so obstinate as to continue to believe the vain prejudice that one piece of land is holier than another.” And for Catholics, the sharing of burial grounds with Protestants was anathema. As Filleau put it: “The false beliefs of the religionnaires . . . render them unworthy of burial in Catholic cemeteries . . . and they are mistaken in choosing such places [for burials], which can only increase their troubles and punishments; their criminal souls will be deprived of the approbations of the Church . . . for all of eternity.”

Huguenots’ insistence on being buried in parish cemeteries near their kin belied Benoist’s refusal to grant these graveyards special significance. The claim of Protestants to a community’s cemetery helped them maintain membership in the community. Filleau’s demand that Huguenots be expelled from parish cemeteries was just not always practical, especially if the means could not be found to buy a new one for Protestants. Royal commissioners of the Edict of Nantes, whose task it was to separate cemeteries, sometimes had to allow Huguenots, at least temporarily, to continue burials side by side with Catholics. If commissioners did order separate cemeteries, financially strapped localities could avoid the expense by dividing an old one and giving Protestants


58 “It is therefore unreasonable that sacred ground, destined to receive only the bodies of those who died in the true belief of the Church, remain open to and profaned by the reception of the bodies of those who separated themselves from the Church and, while alive, condemned its mysteries and holiness” (Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 263, 289).
the part furthest from the church. The division would be signified by a hedge, a ditch, or a wall if the inhabitants could afford one. The Church objected to this arrangement since Protestants would be buried in what had been sanctified ground, in which Catholic remains were located.\footnote{Benoist, \emph{Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes}, 1: 364. According to Thibaut-Payen, under canon law, a wall could prevent pollution of a cemetery. “If two cemeteries are contiguous, the pollution of one does not lead to that of the other, even if they share an entrance, under the condition that they are separated by a wall” (\emph{Morts}, 79 n. 341). However, this ruling may not have applied because of previous Catholic burials in what would now be profaned ground. In protesting the division of old cemeteries between Protestants and Catholics, Filleau argued that the sections given to the “heretics” would contain “the relics of many faithful Catholics which were venerated by both angels and people”; such remains were a “precieux depost” for the church (\emph{Décisions catholiques}, 283, 316).}

But for royal officials and for neighbors of both faiths, partitioning solved the problem of providing separate graveyards. As in the case of mixed cemeteries, divided ones also required cooperation and agreement between the religious groups. Separate but adjacent burial grounds promoted a clearer sense of religious difference than the mixed cemeteries. However, each confessional group still maintained a connection to the parish cemetery and, through it, a clearly defined position in the community itself. In these cases, the second type of confessional boundary was established, one that separated the religious groups without excluding either one.

Shortages of funds, however, only partially account for shared cemeteries. The notion remained powerful that a parish cemetery was common ground used by all members of a community, who buried their dead in familial tombs or in graves near ancestors, even if they had been of the opposing faith.\footnote{In Germany, city and village leaders made this claim explicitly to Catholic clerics opposing mixed burials. In late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Münster, city magistrates continued to permit the burial of Protestant burghers in city churches and parish cemeteries, despite the opposition of the Catholic clergy and the archbishop. The town council considered the issue one for lay rather than clerical decision, and by their citizenship even Protestant burghers had a right to such burial. R. Po-chia Hsia, \emph{Society and Religion in Münster, 1535–1618} (New Haven, Conn., 1984), 129–36. Marc R. Forster presents similar examples from the villages of the diocese of Speyer in \emph{The Counter-Reformation in the Villages: Religion and Reform in the Bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720} (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), 100.}

Huguenots staked their claim to old communal graveyards on their sense of belonging by right of birth and inheritance to local communities and to the nation as a whole. As they argued in their 1597 “Plaintes,” “our fathers had rights to [parish cemeteries] . . . that were public and common. Have we not inherited their rights just as much as this French air we breathe, the cities we frequent, and the homes we inhabit?”\footnote{“Plaintes des églises réformées” in Read, \emph{Cimetières et inhumations} (1862), 142. Catholic polemicists responded to this claim by insisting that Huguenots were not really French precisely because they were heretics. See Henri de Sponde, \emph{Les cimetières sacrés} (Lyon, 1598), 187–88.} This sense of belonging, not religious affiliation, determined one’s place of burial.
Shared cemeteries were common in confessionally mixed areas such as the Poitou, where they existed in over eighty communities. Christian Desplat has counted more than sixty in Béarn. We do not have quantitative studies of the phenomenon in other regions, but works on confessional relations have found them in Normandy, the Agenais, the Dauphiné, and Orange. Filleau also cites lawsuits over common cemeteries from various other places including Brittany, the Angoumois, Saintonge, the Maine, and the Vendômois.

Of course, the cemetery’s arrangement might depend less on the wishes of a community’s inhabitants than on the desires of local power-holders. Protestant seigneurs continued to use tombs in which their Catholic ancestors were buried. They claimed a right of burial in chapels of which their families were patrons by “ancient foundations; others had longstanding rights over tombs in parish churches.” Huguenot nobles insisted on their rights. Catholic anti-Protestant campaigners accused them of using force to bury their dead in parish churches and chapels, as happened in Luçon (Poitou), where Huguenot nobles broke down a church door in 1613 to bury a coreligionist.


Out of the 182 mixed-confessional communities that royal commissioners visited, they were called upon to address cemetery concerns in 71. Thirty had common cemeteries, and in another 51 the two religious groups had divided the cemetery between them (Desplat, “Sépulture et frontière confessionnelle,” 75 n. 21).


For examples, see the Poitevin cases of Louis de Saint-Georges, sieur de Boisse de Exodun and the dame de la Tarbarrière of Chantonnay (Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 163). Spicer reports on the difficulty the Scottish Reformed Church had in stopping the burials of prominent people in churches where their relatives had been buried for generations.

Benoist, Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes, 1: 364. The “Conseil souverain” of Béarn, which protected Protestant interests in the principality, protested to Henry IV in 1601 that “the desire to be buried in the tombs of one’s fathers is a natural right” (Desplat, “Sépulture et frontière confessionnelle,” 72).

“Déposition des [sic] la rupture d’une porte de l’église de Boufferé par des gentilhommes protestants pour faire l’inhumation d’une religieuse, 27 mai 1613,” BMP, Fonds Fonteneau, vol. 14, fol. 233. Benoist relates other cases, for instance one from 1620, in which the widow and
Patronage claims remained powerful, despite the efforts of Counter-Reformation bishops, who sometimes sought to override the inherited rights of even Catholic patrons in churches and cemeteries. For Protestants and Catholics, tombs were strong symbols of familial power, status, and continuity, all aspects of an aristocratic ethos that defied Protestant denials of significance to burial grounds and Catholic fears of profanation by heretics’ remains.\textsuperscript{68} The inhabitants of communities recognized this even for Huguenot patrons. In Chalamont (diocese of Nevers), parishioners associated the church with its patronal family despite the seigneur’s Protestantism and resisted the bishop’s orders in 1612 to exhume his body from the church. They wanted to ensure that the “divine service would continue in the church.” And remembering “the good treatment” they had received from him, they “felt very obliged to his memory.”\textsuperscript{69}

While custom, kinship ties, and seigneurial power could dictate sharing in some communities, in others sharing resulted from carefully constructed compacts to establish peace between the two religious groups. Agreements to preserve peace and concord between neighbors of different confessions were not unusual and date back to the earliest stages of the religious conflict. Olivier Christin has examined the pacts of friendship reached during 1567 and 1568 in a number of communities worried over the resumption of fighting in the second civil war.\textsuperscript{70} Little scholarship exists on similar agreements from later decades, but they continued to be made.\textsuperscript{71} To take two examples from the period of concern here. In 1599, the Catholic clergy of Lusignan (Poitou) assembled with the pastor and members of the Huguenot community and took an oath before royal commissioners to “preserve and observe the edicts and to protect each other.” In 1610, Luçon’s Catholics and Protestants, under the tutelage of the Poitou’s lieutenant-general, Jean Baudéan de Parabère, and their bishop, Richelieu, signed a resolution

\textsuperscript{68} Hanlon, \textit{Confession and Community}, 166–67; and Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1862), 355.

\textsuperscript{69} Quoted in Thibaut-Payen, \textit{Morts}, 173. See also Benoist, \textit{Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes}, 2: 97. It is interesting to note that for these inhabitants the continuation of the divine service depended on honoring the memory of a noble patron, even if he was a Protestant. For the bishop, who brought this case to court, it depended on removing the polluting body of a Protestant from the church, which he eventually succeeded in doing.

\textsuperscript{70} Christin, \textit{Paix de religion}, 122–32. See also Benedict, “Catholic-Reformed Co-existence,” 78–79.

\textsuperscript{71} See Wanegffelen’s discussion of one town, Lectoure, where an agreement was reached in 1576 and renewed in 1603 (\textit{Ni Rome ni Genève}, 323–29).
witnessing their obedience to the king and the desire of “those of one
religion and those of another . . . to remain in peace.”

Agreements such as these did not always concern cemeteries, but
given the potential for conflict over them, they could be an impor-
tant issue for negotiation. As one example from Castelmoron (Agenais)
shows, these accords depended not only on the willingness of local
groups to cooperate but also on the role of royal officials, who spon-
sored and enforced the agreements. Catholic and Protestant inhab-

72 AN TT 262, pp. 136–202 (Lusignan). The agreement concerned a church bell that the
groups had shared for their “assemblies and burials.” Catholics would retain use of it and contrib-
ute to the cost of another for the Huguenots. For Luçon, see Archives historiques du Poitou (Poitiers,
1872), 1: 320–23. Elisabeth Rabut discusses communal oaths by which Catholics and Protestants
agreed to coexist, such as in Taulignan (Dauphiné), where the Catholic inhabitants swore to “live
and die, peacefully and together as brothers under the benefit of His Majesty’s edict, with those
of the said religion prétendue réformée, their fellow citizens” (“Vie religieuse et vie de cité: Catho-
liques et protestants en Dauphiné au lendemain de l’Edit de Nantes,” in Renaissance européenne et

73 “Usage en commun d’un cimetière entre catholiques et protestants en 1609,” BSHPF 2
(1853): 502–5. In nearby Layrac, inhabitants made a similar declaration to royal commissioners in
1602 (Hanlon, Confession and Community, 44, 54, 154).
church. Given the coincidence between the contract’s date and the sitting of the Grand Jours court in Poitiers that heard many of the cemetery cases, it seems likely that someone on the Catholic side (perhaps the recently arrived curé or perhaps his diocesan superiors) objected to the common burial ground. The Protestants agreed to accept a new site “completely separated from the cemetery around the church.” The location chosen was a vineyard outside the town. However, this place was adjacent to a new cemetery the Catholics had purchased to replace the one around the priory, which was now too small for them. Here both groups would have new cemeteries, next to each other. They would be separated by a wall.  

This agreement provided Saint-Gelais’s Huguenots with a new cemetery outside the town, but it was, nonetheless, an arrangement along the lines of the second form of boundary. Catholics and Protestants henceforth buried their dead in adjacent burial grounds separated only by a wall.

The contracts establishing shared cemeteries are not always extant but can be inferred from the records of the court cases that later outlawed them. In lawsuits of the 1630s, Poitevin Protestants cited these contracts for support and claimed that the practice persisted of burying the dead of both religions “promiscuously” because of convention[s] particulières between the inhabitants. “No one had complained about them until now, . . . and Catholics had in no way suffered.” Documents from the lawsuits speak of the communal consent to sharing. Loudun’s Huguenots, seeking to defend their access to a Catholic cemetery in 1633, claimed that “since the establishment of their religion in this city . . . the alliances and friendship between the Catholics and them could not suffer the separation of their burials.” And Catholics too could claim that amitié ancienne had previously governed their sharing of a cemetery with Huguenots, as they did in Saint-Maixent.

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74 The contract is found in ADDS B (Siège royal de Saint-Maixent) Civil, 1635, no. 680, quoted in R. Durand, Saint-Gelais au péril des dragons, 1681–1981 (Niort, 1981), 83–84. Durand suggests that the agreement was made behind the curé’s back, but he is listed among the Catholics agreeing to the contract.

75 Sommaire des raisons que ceux qui font profession de la religion réformée ont de se plaindre de l’arrêt du seizième septembre 1634 donné par nos seigneurs du parlement tenants les grands jours en la ville de Poictiers . . . .” ADV C 49, p. 1.

76 AN TT 250, pièce 40 (22 Dec. 1633).

77 This case concerned not a cemetery with side-by-side burials but one divided into two burial grounds. The phrase “amitié ancienne” comes from the 1635 complaint of the curé and fabrique in Saint-Maixent against their Protestant neighbors for constructing a new wall that would increase the size of the Protestant portion of the cemetery. The plaintiffs wanted the wall reconstructed in its old emplacement and Huguenot graves outside of it moved inside. Its use in this context might have exaggerated the previous friendship between the groups in order to cast the Catholics as victims. Nonetheless, their argument suggests that some previous sense of agreement had been transgressed (Benoist, “Catholiques et protestants en ‘Moyen-Poitou,’ ” 343).
The language of friendship and alliance suggests that good confessional relations existed in these communities or, at least, had existed in the decades prior to the 1630s. But it is difficult to know if we can believe these claims, especially when the minority Protestants made them in the context of lawsuits that led inexorably to their loss of rights in communal cemeteries. Another explanation is possible. The tutelary role that royal commissioners played is perhaps just as significant as the statements of longstanding friendship. In some cases, it seems that commissioners worked out cemetery sharing not with the cooperation of local Catholics but against their wishes. Despite the opposition of the curé and his parishioners in Fresne (Normandy), commissioners in 1612 “maintained . . . those of the [Protestant] religion [in the right of] burying their dead in the place at the end of the cemetery . . . at the charge of separating that part of the cemetery, and they prohibit anyone from troubling them.”

In a case such as this, royal officials were trying to create coexistence through a specific interpretation of the Edict of Nantes’s provisions concerning cemeteries. The minority faith would receive their own part of a divided parish graveyard.

In many confessionally mixed communities, especially in the years after Henry IV’s death and during the renewed warfare of the 1620s, confessional tensions lay close to the surface. But so too did a common interest in maintaining order. Royal officials could encourage this interest by exerting pressure on neighbors of different faiths to reach accords on matters such as cemetery use. They could insist on inserting claims of friendship into the documents as a means of negotiating coexistence. In reproducing documents from lawsuits over cemeteries from the 1630s on, Filleau refers to such arrangements only to denounce them as falsifications of the Edict of Nantes. According to him, the commissioners or judges who sponsored them had been misguided. At issue was the interpretation of article 28 and its ambiguity over two matters—whether entire communities or just the local Huguenots were to pay for new Protestant cemeteries, and whether Huguenots could continue using Catholic burial grounds until provided with new ones of their own. Filleau followed the legal arguments of Jacques Talon: Protestants had to finance new cemeteries themselves, and they could not bury their dead in Catholic ones. But the lawsuits he cites make it clear that royal commissioners in the early decades of the century did not always agree. In Villefagnan (Poitou), commissioners had agreed with the Huguenot interpretation of the edict and allowed them continued use of the

78 In 1611 the same commissioners had overcome Catholic objections and made the same arrangement in Courseulles (Garrisson, Commissions d’application, 244 n. 69).
parish burial ground. In Couhé (Poitou), they had done the same, and here Filleau notes specifically that the curé and Catholic inhabitants had agreed to the arrangement. In Coupe-Chaignée (Poitou), commissioners had divided the cemetery and ordered the two portions separated by a hedge.79

Thus, while under the provisions of the Edict of Nantes, commissioners should have been engaged in separating completely Protestant and Catholic cemeteries, they appear in various places to have participated instead in the (at least temporary) sharing of common ones or, more often, in the division of old cemeteries into two adjacent burial grounds. In other words, they were actively engaged in helping to construct coexistence in localities either by blurring confessional identities or by carving out recognized and accepted spaces for both confessions in communities. But if authorities had worked in this way to achieve coexistence, then their efforts had largely ceased by the 1630s as the royal government moved toward a policy of persecution.

Creating the Third Boundary

Before the 1630s, while commissioners and communities constructed confessional boundaries of the first two types, the Catholic Church remained determined to pursue only the third, that which was most exclusionary. Local priests might reach a modus vivendi with Huguenots, but the Church as an institution sought to ensure the harshest interpretation of the Edict of Nantes and the strictest division between the confessions.80 Shared burial grounds were an obvious source of antagonism. However, cemeteries were a concern of the Counter-Reformation Church quite apart from the fear that the bodies of heretics might desecrate them. Cemeteries were also the focus of a contest between Catholic reformers and their parishioners. While parishioners sought to maintain local control over the religious institutions of their towns and villages, Counter-Reformation bishops wanted to place that authority securely in the clergy’s hands to rid burial grounds of profane activities such as fairs, assemblies, grazing, and dancing.81 Evicting Huguenots eliminated another source of profanation. But doing

79 Filleau does not provide dates for the commissioners’ decisions, but they occurred before 1622. The Couhé suit was heard in 1634; the Villefagnan and Coupe-Chaignée cases were heard in 1645. In all three, the Protestants were evicted from the disputed graveyards (Décisions catholiques, 289–93, 321–23).
81 On this issue, see Luria, Territories of Grace, 70–71.
so was particularly important because it furthered the anti-Protestant campaign’s goal of ostracizing the minority in communities they shared with Catholics. Filleau insisted in his *Décisions catholiques* that Huguenots should no longer be allowed to profane Catholic cemeteries by performing “mechanical arts” or by holding fairs in them. Too often, the quarrels and fights that occurred during fairs resulted in bloodshed that “polluted” the burial ground. Actually, the court judgments Filleau cites in these cases blamed Catholics as much as Protestants for such desecrations, but Filleau bent them to serve his anti-Protestant purpose.82

The Catholic clergy attacked the burial rights of Huguenot seigneurs and found courts sympathetic to their cause. The clerical deputes to the Estates General in 1614 asked for a prohibition on Protestant patrons enjoying their rights over Catholic burial sites.83 Jacques Talon furthered their contention by arguing before the Paris Parliament in 1626 that since Huguenots denied that the souls of the dead could benefit from the “fruit of the . . . prayers” of the living, Protestant patrons should not be able to claim burial in churches. Benoit, who relates Talon’s argument, rejected it by insisting that the prerogatives of a noble, whose ancestors had acquired the right of burial in a church, should be preferred to the avarice of priests.84 But in the courts, the Catholic economy of salvation and the purity of hallowed ground took precedence over seigneurial privilege, and Huguenot nobles were forced to exhume their kin’s bodies from churches and chapels.85

In communities where cemeteries were shared, either by indiscriminate burials or by partitioning, common ground became disputed territory as complaints were raised and lawsuits filed to force the complete separation of burial grounds or the expulsion of Protestant graveyards from biconfessional towns. It is often difficult to know with certainty who provoked the conflict; the documents, especially from

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82 Filleau, *Décisions catholiques*, 314, 315.
84 He was referring, of course, to the expenses the cult of purgatory imposed on Catholics. See Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, 2: 473.
85 For example, in a case from Presigny (diocese of Langres), where the baron Philippe de Choisel was ordered to disinter his wife from a parish church, and in another from Messignac (Angoumois), where the baron des Etangs was forced to dig up his mother from a chapel. For the Presigny case of 1602, see “Le clergé de Langres et les enterrements huguenots (1602),” *BSHPF* 47 (1898): 523–24. For the Messignac case of 1620, see Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, 2: 308. See also two cases from the Chartres region in 1600. One concerned Paul de Valmorin, sieur de Boinville, who had buried one of his children in the parish church of Saint-George-sur-Eure, and the other Louis Godard, who had buried two of his children in the church cemetery of Chanceville (“Le clergé de Chartres et les enterrements huguenots (1600),” *BSHPF* 47 (1898): 524–25. The reproduced document does not give the disposition of the case.
lawsuits, generally list the Catholic inhabitants of a locality as being parties to a suit, without it necessarily being the case that they initiated it. In some cases, however, the dispute does appear to have arisen between the two confessional groups within a town. During the tense year of 1623, in the wake of Louis XIII’s military campaign in the Poitou, the Catholic inhabitants of Niort complained to royal commissioners “against the enterprises of [Protestants] in the cemetery they [the Protestants] have enclosed within the walls of the city.”

Curés also triggered legal disputes that led to Huguenots losing rights to a cemetery. In 1635, the Protestants of Cherveux (Poitou) blamed their expulsion from a burial ground on the hatred of the local priest. Their Catholic neighbors, they said, had always consented to sharing the graveyard. But in some cases it seems that the instigators were diocesan officials or laymen like Jean Filleau. In 1622, the vicar-general, syndic, and deputies of the Catholic clergy of the diocese of Luçon brought a suit to deprive that city’s Protestants of a cemetery they had used in common with Catholics. Bishop of Poitiers, Henri-Louis Chasteigner de La Roche-Posay, filed suits against Huguenots using Catholic cemeteries in a number of communities, including Villefagnan, La Mothe-Saint-Héray, Vouillé, and Nanteuil.

When the courts decided in favor of Catholic plaintiffs, they dismantled the delicate earlier agreements on cemetery sharing and ordered complete separation and removal of Protestant burial grounds outside of cities and towns. We can see the process at work in Latillé (Poitou), where cemetery arrangements moved progressively through each of the three stages of confessional boundary construction. Early in the century royal commissioners sponsored an accord by which the parish cemetery remained common to both religions. But a 1619 lawsuit separated burial grounds, despite the Protestant claim that the earlier agreement had never provoked any dispute among the inhabitants. The curé offered the Protestants another piece of church property at no


87 In this case the dispute was over dividing a cemetery, to which the curé objected because a Catholic was buried on what would be the Protestant side. ADDS-B, (Siège royal de Saint-Maixent [13 Sept. 1635]), cited in Benoist, “Catholiques et protestants en ‘Moyen-Poitou,’” 344 and n. 115.


89 These cases date from the 1640s. Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 322. The bishop was also seigneur of some of these localities. The lack of surviving records of La Roche-Posay’s pastoral visits hampers a more complete investigation of his activities. But his reputation was that of an ardent anti-Protestant campaigner.
cost; he did so, he declared, “to honor God and for the good of peace.” The new cemetery would not be adjacent to the old, but it still offered Huguenots a clearly defined site within the community. The arrangement seemed perfectly acceptable to the people of Latillé—even to the Catholic priest. However, another suit three decades later broke the carefully negotiated arrangement and denied the Protestants their new cemetery because it was established on church-owned land. They were forced to seek another location outside the town.  

Protestants in Loudun suffered a similar fate. In the parish cemetery of Saint-Pierre-du-Marché, Catholics and Protestants were buried side by side. In 1611, Catholics complained about this “usurpation” to royal commissioners, who responded by ordering a wall constructed, at the expense of the whole city, not just the Huguenots, which would divide the cemetery in two. In this manner, the officials sought to maintain “the peace and contentment” among the city’s “principal inhabitants,” which suggests that the cemetery dispute had divided Loudun’s elite. The arrangement lasted two decades. In 1633 the king’s envoy to Loudun, Jean Martin de Laubardemont, ordered the Huguenot burial ground out of the city. The Protestant pastor Daniel Couppe objected: “The alliances and friendship between the Catholics and them [Protestants] . . . could not suffer the separation of their graves. . . . The divided cemetery offered no inconvenience to the Catholics.” Laubardemont rejected the Huguenot argument. The pastor may have been right that the religious groups had lived peacefully with each other in earlier years, but Loudun in the 1630s was caught up in the affair of the diabolically possessed Ursuline nuns, which provoked confessional tension in the city. The Protestants lost not only their cemetery but also their school, which Laubardemont turned over to the Ursulines. From a previously strong position in Loudun, the Huguenots found themselves increasingly on the defensive and excluded from communal life.  

Protestants resisted attempts to force them into new cemeteries and sometimes even the orders that they partition shared burial grounds, as was evident in several Poitevin towns. Luçon’s Huguenots evaded the court summons to answer the lawsuit the Catholic clergy filed against the common cemetery. The court declared them to be in

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90 Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 293–95. Filleau’s account does not give the date of the first agreement. Benoist’s version of this dispute is essentially the same despite his very different view of Catholic actions (Histoire de l’Edit de Nantes, 3:92).  
default, but the Catholic plaintiffs found it difficult to pursue them through the courts. Saint-Maixent’s Protestants resisted building a wall to divide their cemetery from that of Catholics. Royal commissioners had ordered the wall constructed in 1599. Huguenots were still objecting to it in 1612, and the offer of a burial ground outside the city only caused further contention.

In Niort, the two religious groups had clearly separate cemeteries within the city’s walls. But in 1623 Catholics complained to royal commissioners about the Huguenot graveyard. It was new, built during “the recent upheavals.” And, although the Huguenots had enclosed it, the wall and gate obstructed an important public thoroughfare. Catholics insisted that Protestants should restrict themselves to the cemetery they had been granted outside one of the city’s gates. Protestants objected to having their burials pushed outside the city, which was contrary to the order of earlier commissioners that permitted them a cemetery inside the walls. Now the commissioners split along confessional lines. The Protestant sided with his coreligionists. Catholics, he stated, were motivated only by “passion” and were trying to “molest” Huguenots by dumping rubbish before the cemetery gate. He insisted that the graveyard presented no great inconvenience to the community, and so Huguenots should be allowed to use it peacefully. The Catholic official disagreed. The cemetery was contiguous to city walls and a gate; it blocked an important artery. Protestants had no need for two burial grounds and should be content with the spacious one outside the city. With the decision split, the commissioners referred the matter to the king. But they did, at least, reach a temporary compromise: the Protestants would be left their inside cemetery, providing that they would agree to open a passage at one end of it if public necessity required. Perhaps influenced by the tense military and confessional situation in the province, even the Catholic commissioner was not willing to force the most exclusionary form of cemetery arrangement on Niort’s Huguenots.

92 See note 88.
93 Fonds du legs Alfred Richard, ADV F 183, p. 436; “Requete des maire, échevins, bourgeois et habitants catholiques de la ville de Saint-Maixent . . . au sujet de la révolte et violence des religionnaires (1612),” BMP, Fonds Fonteneau, vol. 16, fol. 505; BSP, ms. 870 (1).
94 “Les plaintes . . . [des] habitants catholiques contre les habitants de la r.p.r. (1623),” BMP, Fonds Fonteneau, vol. 68, fol. 415–17; Lièvre, Histoire des protestants, 1: 304. The cemetery was one of a number of issues in dispute between the confessional groups. Others included the Protestant school, Protestants working on Catholic festivals, disruption of Catholic processions, and (from the other side) mistreatment of Protestants in the Hotel-Dieu. One is left with the impression of great tension between the groups, but in these same years, as was the case in Saint-Maixent, they cooperated on the organization of the city’s militia, suggesting that good confessional relations had not broken down completely.
As far as the Catholic clergy was concerned, the Edict of Nantes’s articles on cemeteries called for the complete separation of burial grounds. The lawsuits they filed during the first three decades of the seventeenth century were based on that interpretation, which Protestants continued to dispute. The tide turned definitively against the Protestant interpretation in the 1630s, when the royal judiciary undertook a major attack on Protestant use of Catholic cemeteries. The turn became especially evident in the western provinces with the opening of a Grands Jours court in Poitiers in 1634.95 One of the court’s most important tasks was reversing what Catholics claimed were the Huguenots’ contraventions of laws governing them. Shared burial grounds were an obvious target. The court heard cases from the Poitou, Angoumois, Saintonge, Aunis, and Vendômois.96 Over the next two years, the court ordered the separation of sixty-nine cemeteries in the Poitou alone.97 Those that escaped faced lawsuits in later years. In some places, such as Exoudun, the attack on a mixed cemetery was also an attack on Protestant power, as the court singled out Huguenot seigneurs for their use of Catholic burial grounds.98 Or the threat was leveled not at a seigneur but at the powerful local position of the whole Huguenot group. Protestants, who dominated Melle, had a separate cemetery, but the case before the Grands Jours accused them of continuing to use the Catholic burial ground by force. They were ordered confined to their own graveyard, a blow to the exercise of their will in the town.99

As a result of these lawsuits, Protestants not only had to find other burial grounds and bear the expenses themselves, they had to disinter any bodies newly buried in Catholic cemeteries.100 Their new graveyards required express approval from royal officials so they did not obstruct “commerce,” which is to say the daily activities of local Catholics. This stipulation served as a pretext for pushing the Protestant cemeteries as

95 Grands Jours courts consisted of parlementary magistrates assigned temporarily to repress lawlessness and impose royal will in regions where the local judicial system seemed incapable of doing so. Marcel Marion, Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (New York, 1968), 268.
96 Filleau, DéCISIONS catholiques, 263–323. Filleau also reports cemetery cases from elsewhere, such as the Languedoc, heard before other courts.
97 Benoist, “Catholiques et protestants en ‘Moyen-Poitou,’” 343. The author also lists nine decisions by the Siège royal of Saint-Maixent for 1635 as well as four from other years.
98 The seigneur in Exoudun was Louis de Saint-George, sieur de Boissec. For another example, see the case of the dame de la Tabarrière in Chantonnay. Filleau, DéCISIONS catholiques, 163.
99 Ibid., 278. The documents Filleau reproduces do not clearly indicate whether it was the Catholic inhabitants or the royal prosecutor who initiated the investigation and suit.
100 Ibid., 26. They could be assessed fines starting at 1,000 livres, though in some cases the fines were much larger. In 1633 an ordinance of the conseil d’état threatened Loudun’s Huguenots with 3,000 livres of fines for using Catholic cemeteries. “Extrait des registres du conseil d’estat du roy,” AN TT 250, pièce 39 (29 Nov. 1633).
far as possible from the center of communal life. Anti-Protestant campaigners also sought to increase Catholics’ suspicion of their Protestant neighbors. Official permission for the cemeteries was necessary, Filleau argued, because without close surveillance, new, separate burial sites might provide Huguenots with a place to hide murdered corpses. What more could one expect from people who conducted their funerals at night with so little ceremony (this despite the fact that royal legislation insisted on Protestants conducting their funerals under such conditions).101

In principle, the Protestant clergy had no reason to object to separate burial grounds, and for Elie Benoist, “there seemed something perfectly equitable in a regulation that left Catholics masters of their cemeteries on the condition that they gave others” to the Protestants.102 Accepting them could settle disputes with the Catholic clergy and keep Huguenots obedient to the king’s law. And Huguenots had, at times, shown themselves willing to agree to the strict interpretation of the Edict of Nantes by moving to a new cemetery. As the Protestants of Mollans (Dauphiné) reportedly said to the local bishop in 1600, they were happy to accept a separate burial ground, “since it was the king’s will.”103 Indeed in 1611, the Huguenot leadership assembled at Saumur urged the royal commissioners to hasten the demarcation of new Protestant cemeteries.104 But for other good reasons Huguenots frequently resisted the separations, especially if they meant moving new burial grounds outside town walls. The removal would not only make funerals inconvenient, it could also pose two other problems for Huguenots: it could disassociate their cemeteries from their temples, and it could deny Protestants an important symbol of their place in the community.

Since Calvinists did not believe cemeteries were sacred ground, detaching them from temples should have caused no problem. Indeed, doing so could promote precisely the sort of desacralization of the cemetery that Calvinist ministers desired.105 If Huguenots’ burials were

101 Filleau, Décisions catholiques, 297.
102 Benoist, Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes, 289.
103 Venard, “Église catholique bénéficiare,” 295. But Venard discusses the resistance of Protestants in Tulette to the same bishop after he tried to separate cemeteries there (Réforme protestante, réforme catholique, 781–82).
104 Chevalier, “Difficultés,” 310. Setting up the new cemeteries would, at least, regularize the legal situation of Huguenot burials.
105 On this point, see Vogler, “Législation sur les sépultures,” 231–32. German Lutherans insisted on moving their cemeteries outside of towns to break the connection between graveyards and the cult of purgatory. The difference between their stance and that of French Calvinists suggests that the issue was less doctrinal than political. In areas they controlled, German Lutherans did not have the same stake that Huguenots had in maintaining their inside cemeteries as symbols of their belonging in communities. See Koslofsky, Reformation of the Dead, 46–54.
completely separated from those of Catholics, then they would have less contact with Catholic funeral rituals. And if they were no longer burying their deceased in parish graveyards, they would be less likely than their Catholic neighbors to believe that the ghosts of souls in purgatory lingered in them. But one has to wonder if Huguenots so resolutely rid themselves of their Catholic neighbors’ and ancestors’ beliefs in ghosts. In England, as Keith Thomas has shown, ghost beliefs persisted among Protestants at all social and educational levels. If they did among seventeenth-century Huguenots as well, then such beliefs would have been another motive for them to share churchyards with their Catholic neighbors.

French ministers, however, associated cemeteries and temples for a different reason, one that had nothing to do with purgatory but everything with pedagogy. For Pierre Du Moulin, keeping them adjacent to one another was useful so that while crossing the cemetery on the way to worship, the faithful could meditate on death and thus be reminded of their sinfulness. “The custom arose of putting cemeteries around temples so that one could pass by the graves before appearing in front of God, . . . one could present oneself to death before going to seek life, and thereby recognize ourselves as mortals and by consequence as sinners before beseeching God’s grace.”

Thus moving a cemetery or a temple could break different sorts of links, one with ancestors or their ghosts, which some Huguenots might be unwilling to give up, and another with a useful instructional device, which reminded them that while Protestants were not to participate in the purgatorial cult of the dead, death and their final ends were never to be far from their minds.

The tenacity with which Protestants struggled to defend their rights to old cemeteries suggests that, even if they rejected “superstitious” beliefs, they still invested burial grounds with great importance. A cemetery outside a town might be a perfectly suitable burial place, but it could leave local Huguenots with the sense that their dead, and hence they as well, were being expelled from the community. The famed Protestant hellenist, Isaac Casaubon, commented tellingly on

106 Davis has shown that in the late sixteenth century, ministers and synods warned the faithful against beliefs in ghosts (“such apparitions were angels or devils,” according to Ludwig Lavater), but she feels that by the seventeenth century “the new Protestant sensibility” concerning the dead and funerals “took hold” (“Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny,” 95).


the feeling after attending a funeral outside Paris in 1602: “It was the first time I had seen the place reserved for our burials. We are banished from the city; we are thrown out like rubbish in I don’t know what sort of place. So be it! Our place is with God. Our city is in heaven.”

The assault on the communal symbol of a shared cemetery created a stigma for Huguenots that they had to fight to remain part of local society. Benoist pointed out that since Catholics were prohibited from burying in their cemeteries anyone who the “councils or popes had declared a heretic,” Protestants had to demand “with great insistence that they share the same cemeteries with Catholics.” Huguenots “could not suffer a distinction in burials that would mark them with an odious stain”; to accept a separate burial ground would be to accept that they were heretics.

Of course, Benoist was writing from a post-Revocation perspective, when the results of the state and Church campaign against Huguenots were clear. As we have seen, Huguenots were willing to accept, at least, divided cemeteries and perhaps separate ones if they were not pushed out of communities. His claim illustrates, however, that the separation of cemeteries could reflect and also create a barrier between the two religious groups in a community. He insisted that “Protestants could never live in peace with those who were allowed to carry hatred for them beyond the grave. They could share nothing in life with those who denied them the honor of a common burial ground. One could not treat without contempt, or frequent without horror, people whose corpses, one believed, profaned the ground in which they were buried.” If Catholics became convinced that sharing a graveyard with their Protestant neighbors threatened their eternal fate, then how could a sense of community survive and how could peace exist?

The Huguenots were fighting a losing battle, as became clear from the 1630s on, but the losses would intensify during Louis XIV’s reign. The expulsion of their burial grounds was only one part of a campaign that also expelled their temples. And they too were expelled from schools and universities, craft guilds, civic governments, and royal posts, to all of which the Edict of Nantes had guaranteed them access. By use of the courts, royal legislation, and local allies, anti-Protestant

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109 Quoted in Read, “Cimetières et inhumations” (1863), 34.
110 According to Benoist, because the Edict of Nantes did not treat them as heretics, they should not be denied burial in the same ground as Catholics (Histoire de l’édit de Nantes, 292, 364). Technically, the edict treated Huguenots as “schismatics,” not “heretics.” Louis XIII confirmed this understanding in 1616, thereby claiming that his coronation oath, which obliged him to exterminate heretics, did not apply to Huguenots; they were to be converted not exterminated (Chevalier, “Difficultés,” 316; Labrousse, “Une foi, une loi un roi?” 99–101).
campaigners pursued the construction of the third, exclusionary form of religious boundary. And as Huguenots were increasingly isolated from the communal life they had shared with their Catholic neighbors, the pressure on them grew to erase the boundary through the only means now available—conversion to the majority faith. Cemeteries mirrored the result. On the eve of the Revocation in 1684, a magistrate ordered a new burial ground for the Protestants of Chenay (Poitou). But what they lost was not access to an old Catholic one; that issue had long since been decided in this region's communities. Instead, they lost their separate cemetery to those who had formerly been of their faith. According to the official investigation, Chenay had only some thirteen remaining Protestant families, as opposed to the 170 who had converted. The magistrate ordered a division of the cemetery that would leave the Protestants with only one-fifteenth of the original space.111 By the 1680s, France's Huguenots were rapidly losing ground, figuratively and literally.

Conclusion

The conflicts between religious groups in early modern France has long been well known; only recently has our work started to explore the possibilities for coexistence. This study illustrates how negotiations across the confessional boundary could construct coexistence through an important communal institution, the cemetery, and the rituals that took place within it. In one possibility, Protestants modified Calvinist funerary practice and sought a somewhat more traditional ceremony. They buried their dead in family tombs and shared cemeteries, symbols of both continuing family ties beyond the grave and their enduring position in confessionally mixed communities. Admittedly, Huguenots sometimes forced their way into Catholic cemeteries, but examples of shared burial grounds suggest a commonly accepted, nonantagonistic commitment of both confessional groups to an important institution of communal religion. Practical requirements (usually a lack of funds for separate cemeteries) blurred the borderline between the faiths, but so too did other familial or neighborly concerns as well as a desire to maintain peace.

A second form of confessional boundary is most apparent in communal agreements, which royal officials often sponsored, to share cemeteries not through mixed burials but through division into two adjacent

111 The new Catholics' request to Lamoignon claimed that only three or four Protestant families remained in the parish, but the investigator's report put the number at thirteen. The request and the report are found in ADV C 49 (10 June 1684).
burial grounds. The careful articulation of a space for each group made possible the integration of both into the community. Even if we cannot necessarily accept at face value the agreements' claims of friendship between the groups, we can understand the accords as establishing a situation in which the minority was not excluded.

Insofar as the anti-Protestant campaign succeeded in constructing confessional boundaries in a third discriminatory and exclusionary way, it broke the communal bonds between neighbors of different faiths. And it did so by invoking the fears that had often ignited confessional violence: that members of the minority religion, both dead and alive, were social contaminants and that heresy threatened the body of true believers with pollution.\(^{112}\) Religious difference seemed absolute; it provoked the deepest apprehensions and the most radical reactions. However, recent research has uncovered examples of coexistence from the sixteenth century. And the political settlement of 1598 furthered coexistence by creating a royally sponsored, legal framework for it. Historians of the seventeenth century have found the religious groups living together peacefully in numerous communities.\(^{113}\) Confessional tensions did not disappear, and violence could still occur. But in the early decades of the century, Catholics and Protestants, with the guidance of the state, were finding ways to coexist. What had happened to each religion's capacity to produce a sense of its own absoluteness and of the impurity, indeed the satanic nature, of the other? What had happened to the deep fear of contamination, of pollution? How was the sense of radical difference overcome or set aside?

The beginnings of an answer to these questions lies in examining the relationship between boundaries, confessional identities, and the role of the state in constructing both. The sense of confessional difference was weakest along what I have referred to as the first form of boundary. This situation was coexistence at its most complete. But it was not what the Edict of Nantes intended; it stipulated a greater distinction between the religions. The sense of confessional difference was sharpest along the third form of boundary. When this form of boundary was established, it represented France at its most confessionalized. Each group was closed in on itself, each strengthened its own internal discipline and sense of identity—Catholics to ostracize Huguenots and Huguenots to survive. And the state exerted increasing pressure on the minority religion until it was finally outlawed in 1685. This situation, of


\(^{113}\) See note 2.
course, was also not what the Edict of Nantes intended; it carved out for Protestants a legally protected identity in the kingdom.

The second form of boundary was closest to what was envisioned in the edict, and this despite the competing interpretations Catholics and Protestants had of it. Here the confessional groups were distinct, each within its own cemetery, or with its own allotment of militia members and civic offices, or even its specific times for religious observances. Huguenot psalm singing would not be allowed to interrupt the mass; Catholic processions would not pass by temples when Protestants gathered for the prêche. Confessional tensions could, thereby, be contained, and the religious groups could begin to construct peaceful coexistence, if not true tolerance.

In establishing this kind of boundary the state’s role was essential, through the king’s enforcement of the Edict of Nantes and through the work of commissioners in the provinces. Recognizing the monarchy’s role in promoting coexistence offers a different perspective on the early modern state in confessional relations. Historians generally have seen the state, particularly in German principalities, as an agent of confessionalization, enforcing religious uniformity as a means of increasing state power and authority.\textsuperscript{114} Certainly under Louis XIV, the French monarchy acted in such a way by increasing restrictions on Huguenots, revoking the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and brutally repressing Protestantism thereafter. But in the first several decades of the century, the state sought not confessionalization but carefully constructed coexistence. Admittedly there were limits; Huguenot military strength was destroyed in the wars of the 1620s, and Catholicism was reestablished everywhere as the legally dominant religion.\textsuperscript{115} But coexistence served the aims of state-builders just as much as confessionalization did later. The Edict of Nantes pacified the kingdom. It made the monarchy the arbiter of confessional disputes. The agreements that Catholics and Huguenots reached, negotiated by royal commissioners, spoke of their desire to live in peace “under the king’s edicts” or “because the king commanded it.”\textsuperscript{116} The monarchy became the guarantor of religious peace and hence of civil order.

Thus the French state was, at different times during the seventeenth century, a promoter of coexistence and an agent of confessionalization. But, as the study of cemeteries has shown, in neither case

\textsuperscript{114} See note 14.
\textsuperscript{115} Though local dominance was not always evident in areas with large and powerful Protestant majorities, particularly in the south.
\textsuperscript{116} Such was also the case in the sixteenth-century agreements Christin has found (\textit{Paix de religion}, 122–32).
could the state simply impose its will. Both the efforts of commissioners in establishing agreements in the early decades of the century and the later efforts of courts, such as the Grands Jours in Poitiers, to break such agreements required local cooperation and local agents. Parish priests filing lawsuits in the 1630s against shared cemeteries aided by intermediaries between communities and the state, such as Jean Filleau, were essential to undermining earlier coexistence.

But another dynamic could also be at work in local communities, as the concerns neighbors of both faiths shared for families, sociability, and communal peace transcended confessional difference. Religious divisions did not necessarily disappear, but the sense of community did not depend on confessional identification. Instead it could be constructed by the very process of making peace.

117 Historians of Germany have also recently noted the local dynamic of confessionalization and the necessary role of local people in furthering it. They have, thereby, de-emphasized the state’s role. See Forster, Counter-Reformation in the Villages; Harrington and Smith, “Confessionalization in Germany”; and Heinrich Richard Schmidt, “Sozialdisziplinierung? Ein Plädoyer für das Ende des Etatismus in der Konfessionalisierungsforschung,” Historische Zeitschrift 265 (1997): 639–82.