

LESSONS FROM PARIS AND BEYOND

We were still reeling from the horrific events in Paris when the terrorist killings in San Bernardino gave us another jolt. As we grapple with the significance of these attacks we are wise to consider the adage: *Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.* Much can be learned from these events, especially those that rocked the city of Paris.

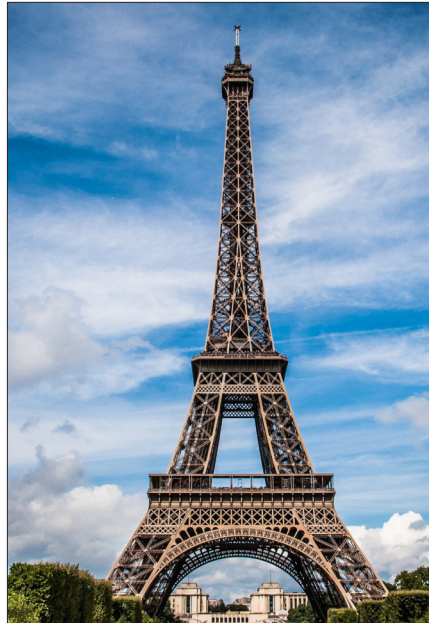
France in the 16th century was Europe's richest and most promising nation. By the mid-1500s, one fifth of the French population had converted to true biblical faith. Known as Huguenots, these French Protestants were mercilessly persecuted and killed by the French royalty and the religious prelates who were determined to maintain their despotic monopoly on power and wealth.

The Huguenots were forced to unite in an army to defend their families and towns. Their leader, Admiral Coligny, led them to victory again and again against the king's forces. By 1572, the Huguenots were close to achieving peace. But 19-year-old King Charles IX



of France was ruled by a ruthless force—his mother, Catherine D' Medici. She was a Machiavellian power monger who controlled France by seducing the men of the court for her purposes through a group of aristocratic courtesans (prostitutes).

Catherine and her conspirators knew that the Huguenots had become too powerful to be crushed in battle. Thus she plotted to destroy them through deception with promises of religious tolerance. As a cover for her deceit, Catherine arranged a marriage



between her Catholic daughter and the future king of France, Henry of Navarre, a Bible-believing Huguenot.

Who can resist a royal wedding? The grand event was to take place on a religious holiday, St. Bartholomew Day, in 1572. King Charles gave Coligny and the Huguenot leadership the promise of a peace accord. The Huguenots were anticipating a time of joy and religious liberty for all. Thousands of believers laid down their guns and swords and came to Paris for the celebration. As the bells of Notre Dame Cathedral rang out on the last night of feasting after the wedding, a huge mob of assassins sprang into action. First, they killed the Huguenot leader, Admiral Coligny, in his bedroom. His head was sent to the Pope as a prize of war. Three thousand Protestants were massacred in the next few days in Paris. Tens of thousands more were cut down all over France in the months that followed.

After the massacre and years of continued persecution, the principled Henry of Navarre became King Henry IV. Under his leadership, the Edict of Nance was signed, guaranteeing religious liberty for both Protestants and Catholics. Decades of prosperity and peace followed. But as soon as Louis XIV—the so-called “god king”—ascended the throne, he revoked the Edict and killed or drove out of France virtually all of the Protestants.



France deteriorated over the next century under ungodly kings who fleeced the wealth of the people and destroyed their freedom. By the time of the French

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Revolution, France had exiled millions of Christians, leaving most of the French people ignorant of the



biblically based, ordered path to liberty. The people were incited to revolt. Once again, Paris became the location of massive

terror perpetrated by an anti-Christian revolution. The motto of the French Revolution—*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*—was a great deception, a deadly lie. Robespierre, the tyrant of the revolution, proclaimed the motto in a speech in 1793 and then proceeded to cut off the heads of 40,000 fellow Parisians by the guillotine.

The promised liberty of the Revolution was never realized. Within a decade the tyranny of the king was replaced by the military dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte, who soon declared himself to be emperor of all Europe. Napoleon plunged Europe into twenty years of war in his quest for world domination, killing tens of millions and exterminating an entire generation of French men.

In stark contrast, the Huguenots, who had been the heart of the liberty-loving middle class in France, emigrated to Holland, England and the Carolinas in America. Their faith and enterprise became an integral part of America's march to freedom and blessing as a nation. They joined millions of other Christians



from Europe in creating a haven of lasting liberty in America. The colonists followed the biblical way of resisting tyranny, not by riot, revolution or genocide, but through brave stands for what

President George Washington called "the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." The people voluntarily chose to base all of their institutions on a biblical foundation, including a limited, self-governing biblical form of government, called a constitutional republic.

A brilliant French Huguenot wrote *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants) two years after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. *Vindiciae* was a popular book that inspired the colonists to resist British tyranny during the War of Independ-

ence in America. *Vindiciae* gave a powerful biblical argument for the people to resist tyranny through lesser magistrates, holding rulers accountable to the biblical limits of their authority. (Romans 13:1-4)

The colonists were highly intelligent and knowledgeable students of history and the Bible. They had studied the biblical rights of the people to resist tyranny (despotism) from many liberty documents such as Magna Carta. They studied the writings of the reformers, especially John Calvin, who taught that while private individuals should not remove rulers through revolution, lower government officials who represent the people have the duty to resist tyranny.

Calvin's influence was reflected in the French *Vindiciae*. The colonists also studied Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (the Law is King) which expanded *Vindiciae* applying it to England and the increasing tyranny of the Stuart kings. The principles of *Lex Rex* were carried forward into America's Declaration of Independence.

If we, as believers today, will study and apply the above "rules of order and right" then we will have a firm foundation to stand boldly and defeat the terrors of radical invaders of any kind. We cannot win with platitudes and mottos like those of the French Revolution, but only through a firm commitment to stand for the Almighty and His ways no matter the cost.

— Marshall Foster



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