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# Conversion, family, and authority in seventeenth-century Saumur

**Conversion, Family, and Authority in Seventeenth-Century Saumur**

At Saumur in the late afternoon on 8 December 1642, Elisabeth Liger, the twelve-year old daughter of a Huguenot apothecary, ran away from her parents' home and declared that she wished to live as a Catholic. Such an extraordinary request by such a young girl prompted a judicial inquiry, and the *procureur du roi* in Saumur ordered that Elisabeth be kept in a safe house until the facts of the case could be established. Meanwhile, Elisabeth's father, Pierre Liger, petitioned the city's magistrates for his daughter's release on the grounds that she was being held against her will. The next morning, December 9, the procureur du roi and a city councilor, both of whom were Catholic, questioned the girl and others who were familiar with the affair. As it happened, the royal intendant for the province of Anjou, Denis de Heere, was in Saumur to oversee the apportionment of the taille. In light of the seriousness of the situation, the procureur du roi asked the intendant to be present at the interrogation. Denis de Heere drew up a procès-verbal of the proceedings; his report allows us to follow the story of Elisabeth Liger's conversion and its aftermath.[1]

It must be said at the outset that the report is biased. The intendant and the magistrates who interviewed Elisabeth were not disinterested in the outcome of her request to convert to Catholicism, and they applied their own beliefs of what it meant to be Catholic to legitimate their decision to honor her appeal. The report privileges the words of certain witnesses—men and women whose testimony supported Elisabeth's request—and diminishes the voices of others—namely, her parents and other Huguenot allies. One should read the description of Elisabeth

[1] Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire (hereafter ADML) 2 B 534: procès-verbal, 9 Dec. 1642.

Liger's conversion as one would read other conversion narratives and biographies of pious men and women—as a collaboration by different parties, with different motives, for different ends.[2] This is not to say that the events described in the report were not authentic or that Elisabeth's wishes were misrepresented. It is only to recognize a limitation that all such sources share. In this essay, I will speak of Elisabeth's conversion and not Elisabeth's "conversion." To repeatedly signal to readers that they ought to treat with skepticism any claims of an inner transformation would be tedious. Denis de Heere's report offers fascinating details of Elisabeth's exposure to and engagement with Catholicism. But as an account of the true state of her conscience, it is fair to say that the report is suspect.

If the report of Elisabeth's conversion cannot tell us what she felt in her heart, however, it can tell us what was happening in her community. The movement of men, women, and children from one institutional church to another often proved to be a provocation to the integrity of religious communities and the prerogatives of rulers. Conversion had political significance as well as religious significance: a person's decision to change religions could expose conceptions of community and authority that underpinned state and society in early modern Europe.[3]

Keith Luria has written about the strategy of Catholic missionaries and polemicists in the seventeenth century to depict conversion to Catholicism as an act of political loyalty and

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[2] Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, 248-52; Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*; Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy*, chap. 5.

[3] Benjamin Kaplan provides a European-wide overview of the social and political issues surrounding conversion in *Divided by Faith*, 268-76.

obedience to the king.[4] In returning to the Catholic fold, Huguenot converts made a demonstration of their political orthodoxy as well as their religious orthodoxy. Moreover, missionaries designed conversion rituals to dramatize the convert's integration into a new community that was politically and socially favored. When the Huguenot Samuel Cottiby made a public abjuration of heresy and embraced Catholicism at Poitiers in 1637, the city's Catholic elite—royal magistrates, the mayor, members of the city council, and other *gens de bien*—was in attendance.[5] Cottiby's example is a reminder that, in the seventeenth century, the French Reformed Church and the French Catholic Church had vastly different statuses in society, at court, and before the law. A conversion to Catholicism brought one closer to the king. "Religious conversion may have entailed an internal movement of conscience," Luria writes, "but to be acceptable the change had to bring the conscience in line with external authority—the Church and, in the French Catholic case, the monarchy."[6] Mack Holt has likewise given attention to differences in the political power and legal status of Catholics and Huguenots to account for the

[4] Luria, "The Politics of Protestant Conversion." Idem, "The Power of Conscience?" Idem, "Conversion and Coercion." Conversions could be politically charged affairs outside of France, too. In 1690, for example, diplomatic relations between Sweden and Brandenburg soured after it was revealed that the Swedish wife of the ambassador of Brandenburg to the court of Karl XI had converted from Lutheranism (the religion of the Swedish king) to Calvinism (the religion of her husband). See Riches, "Conversion and Diplomacy in Absolutist Northern Europe."

[5] Luria, "The Politics of Protestant Conversion," 34.

[6] Ibid., 39.

de-escalation of violence during the religious wars of the sixteenth century.[7] Holt points out that violence often erupted when Catholics felt their control of political and judicial power threatened by a local Protestant minority. Meanwhile, peaceful relations were more likely to prevail in those places where Catholics were able to maintain their hegemony and restrict the rights and protections of Huguenots. In this way, the maintenance of civic order demanded that religious boundaries be clarified and strengthened. At Dijon in the sixteenth century, Holt finds that authorities there were less concerned with enforcing uniformity of Catholic belief than with making sure that the Huguenot minority could not trouble the political and social order. By imprisoning Huguenots and confiscating their property (the restoration of which required them to sign a certificate of conversion), officials at Dijon succeeded in rendering Huguenots harmless, thereby preventing an outbreak of violence at the end of August 1572 when reports of the St. Bartholomew's massacre reached the city.[8] In this essay, I follow the example of Luria and Holt, particularly their emphasis on situating religious coexistence within local and national frameworks of power.

My interest in Elisabeth Liger's conversion is what it reveals about the political and social relations between Catholics and Huguenots under the regime of the Edict of Nantes, and specifically the legal status of Huguenots living in Catholic-majority towns and cities. A twelve-year-old girl had no grounds to challenge the authority of her parents and act independently of their wishes. The authority of fathers over their children was founded in Biblical law and natural

[7] Holt, "Religious Violence in Sixteenth-Century France."

[8] Ibid., 70-1.

law and made secure by the secular laws of the French state.[9] But in Elisabeth's conversion, the principle that fathers should have power over their children was countered by another principle of royal policy: that the Catholic faith was superior to *la religion prétendue réformée*. Elisabeth Liger's conversion made plain the vulnerability of France's Huguenots who lived in towns where they had no impact on judicial decision-making. By elevating the religious conscience of a twelve-year-old girl above her parents' authority, the magistrates who heard Elisabeth's case articulated a conception of community in which the Catholic faithful stood apart from (and above) their Huguenot neighbors. Furthermore, the magistrates were able to invoke the Edict of Nantes to legitimate their decision to remove Elisabeth from her parents' home. At one and the same time, the Edict of Nantes created a framework for Catholic and Huguenot subjects to coexist peacefully and served as a tool for asserting the legal dominance of France's Catholic majority.[10]

**Saumur's Huguenot Minority and Catholic Majority**

The Huguenot community to which Elisabeth's family belonged was not a crouching minority. Although Protestants made up a little more than a tenth of Saumur's population in the mid-seventeenth century, theirs was a church of skilled artisans and craftsmen, shopkeepers and

[9] See note 42 below.

[10] Other historians have noted that the Edict of Nantes' intentions were as much to diminish France's Huguenots as to establish peaceful coexistence. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, 316-7; Cottret, *L'Édit de Nantes*, 250-1; Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV*, 182-3; Mousnier, *The Assassination of Henry IV*, 148-9.

wholesale merchants, and members of the medical and legal professions. But despite enjoying a measure of wealth and prestige, Huguenots at Saumur did not hold positions of political authority. Offices of urban government and justice were in Catholic hands. The situation of Saumur's Protestants—well-integrated in the local and regional economy but marginalized from political and judicial power—was similar to that of many Reformed congregations in the northern part of the kingdom, where the Reformed religion had not made deep inroads and Huguenots were more likely to find themselves facing Catholic majorities.[11] Before turning to the crisis surrounding Elisabeth Liger's conversion, we first need to examine the dynamics of Catholic-Protestant relations in her hometown.

Saumur had had fleeting associations with the Reformed religion in the sixteenth century, but with the exception of a few months in early 1562 when Huguenot militants seized the city and held it for the prince of Condé, a stable community of Calvinist worshippers never developed and the town remained under Catholic and royal control. That changed in 1589, when Henri III named Philippe Duplessis-Mornay governor of Saumur as part of a military alliance between the king and Henri de Navarre. Duplessis-Mornay was a close confident of the Huguenot prince of Navarre and an ardent champion of the Calvinist movement in France. It was with Duplessis-Mornay's arrival in Saumur that a permanent Huguenot community began to emerge and the city acquired its reputation as a bastion of the Reformed religion.[12]

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[11] Benedict, *The Huguenot Population*, 29-30.

[12] On Philippe Duplessis-Mornay's political activity, both before and after his installation as governor of Saumur, see Patry, *Philippe du Plessis-Mornay* and Daussy, *Les huguenots et le roi*.

The new governor quickly set about making provisions for the practice of Protestantism in the city. He recruited pastors to preach to the congregation of Calvinist worshippers—initially members of his household and soldiers in the garrison he commanded, but in time more and more townspeople—and he personally donated funds to build a temple. Unlike places of worship in other towns where Huguenots were a minority, the Reformed temple at Saumur was not consigned to the outskirts but instead stood within the city walls.[13] Providing Saumur's Protestants with a place of worship was just the beginning of Duplessis-Mornay's plans, however. The governor appreciated that, in the era following the Edict of Nantes, the struggle between the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church was entering a new phase; it was ceasing to be a political and military conflict and was transitioning into a cultural and intellectual battle.[14] To ensure the longevity of French Protestantism in these changing times, Duplessis-Mornay founded the Academy, a school whose mission was to prepare young men for the pastorate through a rigorous curriculum in the humanities and theology. The Academy was established by 1606, and its success was immediate. Scholars from across Calvinist Europe traveled to Saumur

[13] On the conflict over the location of temples in Reformation France, see Roberts, "The Most Crucial Battle of the Wars of Religion?" and Foa, "An Unequal Apportionment."

[14] Pittion, "Naissance de l'institution," 73. See also, Poton, "Philippe Duplessis-Mornay à Saumur," 67.

to teach and study, and the Academy cemented the city's reputation as a stronghold of the Reformed religion.[15]

With Duplessis-Mornay as governor, the Protestant population at Saumur grew. Reformed Protestantism had no public presence in the town when he arrived in 1589; by the second decade of the seventeenth century, a few hundred households and a floating population of students—approximately 20 percent of the city's 10,000 inhabitants—gathered for worship at the temple.[16] The demographic expansion would not continue into the 1620s, as we will see, but to local Catholics observing the stunning success of the Huguenots and their church, it must have seemed that the Reformed religion would only continue to expand and prosper. If Saumur was not quite a Huguenot town, then it was certainly a town with a vital Huguenot presence.

But even though their numbers were greater and the public exercise of their religion was more secure, Protestants in the city still found themselves shut out of positions of power. Huguenots did not number among the handful of old Saumurois families who for decades had dominated royal judgeships and offices in the municipal government. Furthermore, there was no tradition of *mi-partiement,* of dividing seats on the town council and other administrative bodies between Catholics and Protestants.[17] The link between the exercise of power and the Catholic religion was made even stronger into the seventeenth century, as new institutions of the Catholic

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[15] On the Huguenot academies in France, see Bourchenin, *Étude sur les académies protestantes*. Pittion, "Les académies réformées." Deyon, "Les académies protestantes." Maag, "The Huguenot academies."

[16] Poton, "Les protestants de Saumur au XVIIe siècle: étude démographique," 15-7.

[17] Chareyre, "Les protestants de Saumur au XVIIe siècle: religion et société," 45.

revival enlisted local elites. The minutes of an assembly of the local confraternity of the Holy Sacrament from 1644 show a number of prominent Catholics—officers in the prévôté and sénéchaussée and elected officials on the town council as well as several lawyers and master craftsmen—among the confrères in attendance.[18] The activities of the confraternity fortified the religious identity and reinforced solidarity among men of power and high standing.[19] Indeed, Saumur's Catholics may have found the successes of the Reformed Church less threatening, knowing that they maintained privileged access to positions of political and judicial authority.

The situation of Huguenots at Saumur was dramatically upended in 1621. In May of that year, Louis XIII, on his way to put down a rebellion of Huguenot nobles in the southwest, removed Duplessis-Mornay as governor of the city and commander of the garrison. An outburst of religious violence followed on the heels of Duplessis-Mornay's removal from power. For a time, it looked as if his departure might trigger the complete demise of the Reformed community at Saumur. In June 1621, on the Feast of the Holy Sacrament, a number of Catholic townspeople rang the tocsin and roved the streets in armed gangs—activity that frightened Huguenots interpreted as signs of an approaching massacre.[20] Several days later, crosses and gallows sketched in coal appeared on the walls outside Protestant homes and shops.[21] Meanwhile, rumors swirled that the Academy would be transferred to Loudon or else closed down entirely. Writing to a friend from exile at his family estate, Duplessis-Mornay lamented the dissolution of the

[18] ADML 5 E 69/323: assembly of the confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, 27 Nov. 1644.

[19] Barnes, *The Social Dimension of Piety*.

[20] Liques, *Histoire de la vie de Messire Philippes de Mornay*, 615.

[21] ADML 2 B 1358: judicial inquiry, 16 June 1621.

church and school he had fostered. For Protestants at Saumur, the loss of their community's patron was devastating, and some families were thinking of leaving the city, "from which will follow the complete dissipation of the church as well as of the Academy, which are already greatly weakened."[22]

Duplessis-Mornay's fears of the collapse of Reformed Protestantism at Saumur did not come to pass. To be sure, the demographic expansion that had marked the early decades of the seventeenth century was checked after 1621. Thereafter, the congregation fell into a gradual decline, a contraction in population that Protestant congregations across northern France experienced in the middle decades of the seventeenth century.[23] But even though their numbers were fewer, Saumur's Huguenots continued to gather at the temple to praise God in the Reformed style. The Academy continued to train new pastors and grew in prominence. The relative calm that reemerged at Saumur prefigured the easing of inter-confessional tension throughout much of the kingdom after the submission of La Rochelle in 1628 and the subsequent Peace of Alès, which affirmed the Huguenots' rights to worship freely but put an end to their capacity to pose a military threat to the crown.

By the 1640s, then, the Huguenot community at Saumur was smaller than it had been but well-established nonetheless. Protestant heads of household worked in several of the more prestigious, and profitable, occupations in the city and worshipped with their families in one of

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[22] Médiathèque municipale de Nantes, Collection Dugast-Matifeux: Papiers de Mornay, Ms. 94: letter to Lesdiguières, 10 Aug. 1621.

[23] Poton, "Les protestants de Saumur au XVIIe siècle: étude démographique," 15; Benedict, *The Huguenot Population of France*, 30-2.

the nicer temples in France. The presence of the Academy no doubt added to the congregation's cultural confidence as a people of God and served to remind Huguenots that they were members of a much wider body of believers that stretched across Europe. The security and confidence felt by Protestant townspeople may account for the rarity of mixed marriages and conversions at Saumur. The records of the consistory are generally the best source for the movement of individuals across religious lines for reasons of matrimony or conscience, but those for Saumur have not survived. However, the records of baptisms, marriages, and burials for the Reformed and Catholic congregations show very few individuals appearing in different churches at different stages of life.[24] The religious divisions that cut through the city tended not to cut through families, with the result that most individuals shared a religious identity with their kin.

That Catholics and Protestants did not have to confront religious differences in their families may have made the accommodation of religious differences in public life easier to bear. In this way, the observance of religious boundaries helped to promote peaceful relations.[25] Huguenots were aware of their minority status—it likely strengthened their collective identity as a people of God—but they were nonetheless part of the economic and social institutions of the city. As evidence of the tenor of relations between Catholics and Huguenots in daily life, we can look to Elisabeth Liger's own testimony. The prologue to her conversion to Catholicism was a lifetime of having Catholics as friends and neighbors.

**Elisabeth Liger and the Practice of Coexistence**

[24] Marr, "Urban Encounters and the Religious Divide," 261-5.

[25] Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, xxviii-xxix.

Elisabeth was raised in a solidly Protestant household, one that was well integrated into Saumur's Calvinist community. The second of nine children born to Pierre Liger and Rachel David, Elisabeth was baptized at the temple in November 1630. Her godparents were Huguenots of high status: Marc Duncan, a physician and professor of Greek in the Academy, and Isabel Bourceau, the wife of a prominent *bourgeois*, presented her for baptism.[26] Elisabeth's parents appear to have been well respected within the Protestant congregation. Pierre Liger was godfather to at least three children baptized in the Reformed church and served as a church elder, a position that spoke to his standing as an upright member of the Reformed community.[27] All of this suggests that Elisabeth grew up immersed in the religious traditions of Saumur's Huguenot minority, singing the Psalms, reading the Bible with her family, reciting lessons from the catechism, and listening to her pastors preach the pure Word of God.

But despite her Protestant upbringing, the girl told her examiners that, for more than three years, she had had a desire to convert to Catholicism. It was this desire to convert, she said, that

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[26] ADML I 6: register of baptisms, 1625-1646, fol. 14v, baptism of Isabel Liger (10 Nov. 1630).

[27] Pierre Liger appears three times as *le parrain* in the baptismal register of the Reformed church. See ADML I 6: register of baptisms, 1625-1646, fol. 2v, baptism of Magdelaine Galand (8 June 1625); fol. 49v, baptism of Marie Leglise (10 Nov. 1638); fol. 54v, baptism of Marie Belosier (18 Jan. 1640). Pierre Liger is identified as a church elder in the baptismal entry for his son Louis in 1641. ADML I 6: register of baptisms, 1625-1646, fol. 60v, baptism of Louis Liger (17 Oct. 1641). Pierre Liger also appeared in his capacity as an elder on behalf of individuals wishing to make known their membership in the Reformed church. ADML 2 B 534: *attestation de foi* of Elizabeth Viet, 8 Nov. 1644; *attestation de foi* of Jean Benoist, 27 Jan. 1650.

prompted her to inquire into what Catholics said and did in worship. She had learned several Catholic prayers and surprised her examiners by reciting the Pater Noster and Ave Maria without mistakes. She had acquired a rosary as well as some holy water, which she kept hidden in a hole that she had made under her bed and used to bless herself before going to sleep.[28] Equipped with these religious aids and knowing a few of the appropriate prayers, Elisabeth practiced Catholic devotions in secret.

How was it that a girl raised in a Huguenot household came to learn the prayers and practices of the rival religion? As it happened, Elisabeth's social world was crowded with Catholics from whom she could glean bits of religious knowledge. A Catholic servant girl worked in her family's house; Elisabeth had entrusted her rosary to this servant to safeguard and perhaps shared with her other details of her clandestine Catholicism. Elisabeth claimed to have picked up fragments of religious lore from her friends, too. Catholic playmates had taught her to say the prayers of the rosary, and one friend had gone with Elisabeth to the château in Saumur and introduced her to a certain Father Maurice Bernardais, a friar in the convent of the Recollects. Elisabeth's attraction to Catholicism also led her to go inside the church of St. Pierre in Saumur, where she met Péronne Loyseau, the wife of the church caretaker. Elisabeth returned to the church several times to talk with madame Loyseau, who grew fond of the Huguenot girl. When Elisabeth ran away from home, she took refuge with the caretaker's wife and confided to her that she wished to change religions. For her part, Péronne Loyseau reported that she was not surprised at Elisabeth's zeal for Catholicism. She had heard that the Catholic wet-nurse who

[28] ADML 2 B 534: procès-verbal, 9 Dec. 1642 : "et soubz son lict elle avoit faict un creuz dans lequel elle avoit reservé de l'eau beniste pour en prendre en se couchan."

suckled Elisabeth as a baby had commended her to the Virgin Mary, from whence came the girl's attachment to the Mother of God.[29]

Servants, playmates, and neighbors—the social network of a twelve-year-old Huguenot girl included numerous Catholic acquaintances. In this, Elisabeth was not so different from her parents and other adult members in the Huguenot community. The apothecaries' guild to which Pierre Liger belonged included both Catholic and Huguenot masters, and he consulted frequently with his colleagues to oversee and protect their professional interests.[30] And because guild membership tended to be kept in families—a master often passed his position to a son or nephew—guilds that were religiously mixed could expect to remain so for generations. Among men of the same profession, an element of camaraderie was often involved, too. Jean Courtin, a Huguenot cloth merchant, not only did business with Catholics but also played boules and drank wine with them. Courtin's activities did not strike others as inappropriate or unseemly—*un homme fort sage et de bonne conduite* is how one Catholic acquaintance described him.[31] To the contrary, his interactions with Catholic associates were part of accepted patterns of sociability.

The structures and rhythms of urban life in seventeenth-century France enabled routine, ongoing interaction between men and women of rival faiths. The *quartier*, the market stall, the

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[29] Ibid.: "Et mesmes a ouy dire à la norisse de ladicte fille, femme devotte et affectionnée au service de la Vierge, que trèz souvent pendant qu'elle estoit en sa maison pour estre norie de laict elle l'avoit voüée à la Saincte Vierge et defaict elle qui parle a recogneu en cett enfant une particulliere devotion à la Vierge."

[30] ADML 5 E 69/326: assembly of the master apothecaries, 11 Dec. 1646.

[31] ADML 2 B 1360: judicial inquiry, 2 Oct. 1657.

guildhall, and the notary's chambers were all locations where, as part of the regular patterns of daily life, Catholics and Huguenots met to conduct their affairs and give expression to their shared interests. In this way, it is not surprising that Elisabeth Liger would have had daily and sometimes intimate contact with Catholics in her community. Her social milieu, like that of her parents and other Huguenot townspeople, was populated with people of the rival religion. Her life intersected with the lives of Catholics, enough so that she was able to see them as companions and confidantes.

The familiarity between Catholics and Huguenots that developed in bi-confessional towns like Saumur does not mean, however, that seventeenth-century men and women took religious coexistence as the model for how their communities *should* be organized. Although the Edict of Nantes was able to bring an end to the violence between warring religious groups in France by working out arrangements that would allow Catholics and Calvinists to worship freely (with restrictions on where the Protestant cult was allowed) and live peaceably, the edict did not disavow the widely shared principle that uniformity of belief—in a kingdom, a town, or a household—was always preferable.[32] The edict's preamble makes plain that the privileges granted to Reformed subjects were provisional concessions, meant to remain in place until it pleased God to reunite all subjects of the king in the same church. When Elisabeth fled from home and declared her intention to convert, her actions did more than just disrupt relations within her family. Her actions exposed the tensions inherent in the Edict of Nantes and made clear the inferior legal status that Huguenots held in Catholic conceptions of community.

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[32] Mousnier, *The Assassination of Henry IV*, 143; Holt, "Religious Violence in Sixteenth-Century France," 72.

**Conversion, Authority, and the Problem of Protestant Fathers**

Elisabeth ran away from home on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Earlier in the day, she had gone to the church of Notre Dame de Nantilly to observe the solemnities. Her mother, Rachel David, learned of what Elisabeth had been up to and scolded her when she returned home. Rachel David then ordered her daughter to remain in the house while she went out to look for her husband and their minister. But instead of doing as she had been told and waiting for her parents to return, Elisabeth took advantage of her mother's absence to run to the home of Péronne Loyseau. There, Loyseau later reported, Elisabeth declared that she wished to convert to the Catholic faith.

The meaning of Elisabeth's actions posed a problem for the officers of justice who were considering her declaration. On the one hand, she seemed to take deliberate steps to leave her parents' home and the church in which she was raised. On the other hand, the circumstances of her leaving suggested that it was the fear of punishment rather than the desire to change religions that had prompted her behavior that day. Moreover, Pierre Liger had gone before the *lieutenant criminel* to make a complaint, alleging that his daughter had been tricked into saying that she wanted to convert. The Edict of Nantes prohibited subjects of both churches from removing children, either by force or persuasion, from their parents in order to baptize or raise them in the rival religion (article 18). However, the edict also stated that no one was to be forced against his or her conscience in matters of religion (article 6). The edict granted this safeguard of conscience to Reformed subjects, but Catholics also appealed to the edict to protect their religious

practices.[33] The judges thus had to decide this question: was Elisabeth Liger's request to live as a Catholic a case of deception of the young and innocent, or was it a conversion? And if it was the latter, what was to be done with the girl?

These were legal questions having to do with Elisabeth's claims to protection under the Edict of Nantes, but they were also questions that touched on the state of her conscience. Here, the judges filtered the testimony of Elisabeth and other witness through their own Catholicism—their understanding of what it meant to live as a Catholic as well as their comprehension of the spiritual forces moved souls to convert. The Catholic officials who heard Elisabeth's case were able to take aspects of her testimony that otherwise might seem detrimental to her appeal—her youth, her gender, and her ignorance of Catholic doctrine—and represent them as proof of her conversion.

Catholic and Reformed theologians concurred that a change of religion undertaken for personal gain—to acquire wealth or status or avoid hardship—and not from a movement of one's conscience was invalid. Accusations of bribery and enticement dogged cases of conversion. Huguenot polemicists routinely denounced instances of conversion to Catholicism—especially the conversions of Protestant nobles—as proceeding from promises of high office and other favors one could obtain by belonging to the religion of the king. Catholic writers leveled similar accusations whenever one of theirs changed religions. Monks who converted, it was said, were unhappy with convent life or unwilling to accept the discipline of their superiors. Elisabeth Liger's state desire to change religions risked such a reading: she was in trouble at home and afraid of being punished, and so she ran away.

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[33] Luria, "The Power of Conscience?," 119.

The judges therefore focused closely on Elisabeth's relationship with her parents and their treatment of her. Several times in the interrogation, her examiners asked her why she had left home and whether she was afraid of her parents' reprisals. Elisabeth responded consistently: her parents did not abuse her, and the only thing compelling her to leave them was her desire to live as a Catholic. The magistrates repeated the question with Pierre Liger and Rachel David in the room with their daughter, and Elisabeth gave the same answer. The magistrates then offered assurances to the girl that, if she wanted to return home with her parents, they would treat her well and not punish her for what she had done. Pierre Liger and Rachel David seconded this promise to their daughter "with tender words." Elisabeth's response remained the same, telling her examiners that she had no reason to leave her parents other than her desire to be Catholic.[34] The repetition of the questions and the constancy of the responses allowed the judges to conclude that spiritual and not temporal concerns were behind Elisabeth's actions.

The ability and willingness to see spiritual motives in Elisabeth's actions derived from the judges' own Catholicism. As Catholics, they were prepared to see good works as an aid to faith, and they therefore gave credence to the things Elisabeth did. Seventeenth-century Catholicism taught that an understanding of doctrine did not have to precede a confession of faith. Attendance at church ceremonies and devotional practices were what made one Catholic; performance would awaken piety.[35] Elisabeth prayed the Pater Noster and Ave Maria, she blessed herself with holy water, she made repeated visits to the church of St. Pierre—through

[34] ADML 2 B 534: procès-verbal, 9 Dec. 1642.

[35] Pittion, "L'affaire Paulet," 216-7; Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, 266

such pious acts, it was thought, belief would blossom.[36] Moreover, Elisabeth already appeared to grasp certain articles of Catholic faith, such as the intercession of the saints, even if she did not have any comprehension of the church teachings that supported them. And her examiners were prepared to see all of this as a sign of divine inspiration.

An appeal to divine inspiration also allowed Elisabeth's examiners to see past her total ignorance of the doctrines of Catholicism. She claimed not to know the difference between the two religions but attributed her desire to live as a Catholic to an inspiration from God. Here again, the judges' Catholicism prepared them to accept certain evidence in support of Elisabeth's request. The magistrates heard the testimony of Father Maurice, the Recollect priest who had spoken with Elisabeth. He told the judges that he had initially doubted the girl's request to convert, given how little she knew of Catholic doctrine. But her persistence persuaded him, and he began to see in her avowals "something of the spirit of God." After all, he explained to the magistrates, there were cases of pagan maidens who had been ignorant of the tenets of Christianity but who had nonetheless suffered martyrdom in Christ's name. Only a transformation of the soul wrought by the Holy Spirit, the priest testified, could account for such

[36] Elements of Catholic ritual attracted other Huguenot converts, too. Jean Gesse, an elder in the Reformed church at Mauvezin in Gascony, wrote a defense of his conversion to Catholicism in 1665. In it, he described being overcome with feelings of piety upon seeing a Catholic penitential procession, feelings that he never experienced in the austere practices of the Reformed Church. Labrousse, "La conversion d'un huguenot," 60-1.

unshakeable resolve.[37] There was a tradition within Christianity of female saints—Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila were two examples with whom Catholics in seventeenth-century France would have been familiar—who displayed signs of divine election at a young age and pursued their spiritual lives against their families' wishes.[38] This tradition may have prepared Elisabeth's examiners to take her request to live as a Catholic as sincere not in spite of her being a young girl but because she was a young girl. The fact that she had been moved to run away on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—a feast that celebrated the sinless purity of a girl who

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[37] ADML 2 B 534: procès-verbal, 9 Dec. 1642: "Et à l'instant avons mandé le reverend père Maurice, religieux Recollet, predicatuer ordinaire de cettedicte ville, demeurant au couvent dudict ordre, lequel enquis sur ce que dessus. Nous a dict que deux ou trois mois sont ou environ cette petitte fille icy presente qu'on luy dist estre fille d'un appoticquaire de la religion pretendue reformée luy fut amenée au couvent des pères Recollectz laquelle ayant esté examinée, il ne fest pas grand compte pour la première fois de ce qu'elle luy tesmoigna desirer sa conversion puis l'ayant examinée une seconde fois et la voyant persister il jugea qu'il pouvoit y avoir quelque chose de l'esprit de Dieu, y ayant exemplée de vierges payennes plus jeunes qu'elle et qui n'eussent seus non plus qu'elle rendre raison distinctement des articles de la foy, lesquelles ont souffert le martire pour la cause de Jesus Christ, dont l'effect ne peult estre imputé qu'à l'inspiration du Sainct Esprit à qui il appartient de convertir les ames et d'operer de plus grandes merveilles."

[38] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 37-45. On the construction of female sanctity in the medieval and early modern periods, see Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen* and Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Teresa*.

dutifully accepted her part in divine mysteries she did not understand—was perhaps a further reminder to her Catholic examiners that God sometimes worked through innocent virgins to advance the cause of His Church.[39]

The evidence and testimony were sufficient for the judges to pronounce that Elisabeth had not been suborned, as her parents alleged, but was sincere in her appeal to live in the Catholic faith. The procureur du roi recommended that, for the sake of her "liberty," Elisabeth should be taken out of her parents' home and sent to live with the Sisters of the Fidélité to receive instruction in the Catholic faith, "until she be of an age to resist her parents' authority over her, for the good of her religion." The royal intendant endorsed the procureur du roi's judgment and further ordered Pierre Liger to pay the cost of his daughter's room, board, and education in the convent.[40]

The "liberty" to which the procureur du roi referred was Elisabeth's liberty of conscience, the right to free worship safeguarded by the sixth article of the Edict of Nantes. The magistrates told Pierre Liger and Rachel David that, if their daughter truly had received a divine inspiration

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[39] On the historical development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 236-54.

[40] ADML 2 B 534: procès-verbal, 9 Dec. 1642: "Ledict procureur du roy a remonstré qu'il importe pour la liberté de ladicte Elizabeth Liger qu'elle soit ostée de la maison de sesd. père et mère jusques à ce qu'elle soit en aage de resister (pour le bien de sa religion) à leur aucthorité et qu'elle soit mise en une maison religieuse en pention pour y estre instruitte selon son intention aux fins dequoy il est necessaire que le père contribüe pour ses allimens à raison de ses facultez et de ce que ladicte Elizabeth depen seroit en sa maison si elle continuoit d'y demeurer."

to convert, she was permitted by the king's edicts to live as a Catholic without interference.[41] And yet, the protection of her liberty of conscience—the "good of her religion"—meant the derogation of her father and mother's authority. The authority of fathers over their children—an authority buttressed by natural law and sanctioned by Scripture—was taken as the bedrock of a well-ordered state and society in the seventeenth century. Deference to paternal power was seen as an essential component in maintaining a respect for hierarchies inherent in the social and political order.[42] Furthermore, early-modern French fathers were the beneficiaries of what Sarah Hanley has called the "family-state compact." Legists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, anxious to consolidate their social status and protect the value of their offices, sought to extend their control over the formation of families. By strengthening the legal rights that fathers enjoyed over family matters—permission of children to marry and details of the marriage contract, contests over the legitimacy of children, and rules of inheritance—legists could ensure that the network of family alliances served their professional and social interests.[43] Finally, both Catholic and Reformed moralists viewed the household as the incubator of piety and assigned to fathers

[41] Ibid.: "si s'estoit une veritable inspiration elle eust la liberté de l'executter soubz l'aucthorité des edictz du roy."

[42] Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, 118-22; Mousnier, *The Institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy*, 85-91; Farr, *Authority and Sexuality in Early Modern Burgundy*, 23-6.

[43] Hanley, "Engendering the State."

oversight of the religious development of their wives, children, and dependents.[44] The "authority of fathers" and the "good of religion" were thought to go together, with the latter depending on the former.

The work of Leslie Tuttle on pronatal policy in the seventeenth century and the work of Karen Carter on royal efforts to promote Catholic religious instruction highlight the different roles that the monarchy assigned to fathers in creating a stable polity.[45] The patriarchal regime that these policies sought to reinforce, however, was one in which legitimate power was Catholic. Elisabeth Liger's conversion threw into confusion familial relationships and religious identities—father and daughter, Catholic and Huguenot—that were of great importance to Catholic conceptions of a well-ordered society. How magistrates at Saumur resolved this confusion reveals much about which hierarchies mattered more. Elisabeth's parents were Huguenot, she was Catholic (or so the judges believed), and so, for the good of her religion, it was important that she be able to resist their influence over her. Simply put, Pierre Liger was not the kind of father whose authority over his children the crown wanted to enhance.

We can see the logic of the magistrates' decision applied in other cases of conversion by Huguenot children, both before and after the Liger affair. In 1621, the Parlement of Paris sentenced a Protestant father to pay the costs of his sons' upkeep at the College de Navarre after

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[44] On the role of fathers in household devotions in the Reformed Protestant tradition, see Garrisson, *Les protestants au XVIe siècle*, 88-9 and Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 509-11.

[45] Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime*; Carter, *Creating Catholics*.

the boys (aged thirteen and eleven) testified that they wished to be raised Catholic.[46] At Lyon in 1677, the superior of La Maison des Nouvelles Catholiques came before the lieutenant-général of the sénéchaussée, bringing with her the thirteen-year-old daughter of a Huguenot lace-maker. The girl had confessed her desire to convert to Catholicism, the superior reported. The magistrate interrogated the girl, found her declaration sincere, and assigned custody of her to the superior of the convent.[47] In these cases, as in Elisabeth Liger's, royal officers of justice were prepared to rule that the authority of Huguenots fathers deserved less protection than the rights of their Catholic children.[48]

It is not surprising that Pierre Liger's petition to Saumur's secular authorities to have his daughter returned to him was dismissed. For one, monsieur Liger had no institutional position

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[46] Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, 186-7. Elie Benoist describes this case in his *Histoire de l'Edit de Nantes*, 2: 364-6.

[47] Martin, *La conversion protestante à Lyon*, 149-50 and 283-5 (pièce justificative IV).

[48] Although the undermining of Huguenot parental authority that we witness in the Liger affair in 1642 can be seen in other episodes throughout the seventeenth century in France, it is certainly true that state initiatives to encourage the conversion of Huguenot children increased after Louis XIV assumed personal rule. In March 1661, a royal arrêt lowered the age at which children could convert to 14 years for boys and 12 years for girls. Four years later, a declaration from November 1665 pronounced that children who converted to Catholicism could demand a pension from their parents. See Luria, *Sacred Boundaries*, 184-9 and Pittion, "L'affaire Paulet," 213-4. The ruling made by Saumur's Catholic officers in Elisabeth Liger's case anticipated this royal legislation by 20 years.

from which he might mount a challenge to the procureur du roi's decision. Philippe Duplessis-Mornay could have played such a role, but it had been twenty years since he had been governor. Saumur's Huguenot congregation in 1642 could not summon any powerful protectors to come to its defense in times of crisis. All Pierre Liger could do was appeal to the Edict of Nantes and claim that his daughter had been deceived. The trouble was, his daughter was appealing to the same edict in her bid to free herself from her parents' influence. Under the Edict of Nantes as interpreted by Saumur's Catholic magistrates, twelve-year-old Elisabeth had higher status and enjoyed greater legal protection than her father. This was not the world turned upside down, however. By removing Elisabeth out of her parents' home, the judges did not see themselves as upsetting the proper social and moral order; rather, they saw themselves as ensuring the proper order. Elisabeth Liger's conversion became an occasion to reinforce a conception of community in which Catholics had complete control over the institutions of civic life as well as the power to grant freedom of worship.

I want to end by saying that the issues and themes explored in this essay are ones that Barbara Diefendorf has previously dealt with. In "Give Us Back Our Children," she recounts episodes from the early years of the French Catholic Reformation of young men and women who pursued religious vocations in defiance of their parents' wishes. Tensions within families erupted when sons and daughters wrecked their parents' plans for them and joined one of the new religious orders that grew up in the era after the sixteenth-century religious wars. Parents accused their children of neglecting their filial duty and enlisted the aid of secular authorities to prevent their sons and daughters from carrying through with their intentions to take religious vows. Meanwhile, children justified their acts of rebellion by appealing to their obligations of obedience to God the Father. Barbara locates the choices and religious sensibilities of these men

and women—many of them from socially elite families—in the ascetic devotional environment that emerged as a result of the crisis within late sixteenth-century Catholicism.[49]

The stories of children defying their parents to join religious orders that Barbara relates in "Give Us Back Our Children" have structural resemblance to the story of conversion that I have told here. What links them is the interplay of family, state, and church—three institutions integral to the social and political order in Old Regime France. In her conclusion to that article, Barbara wrote that new research on religious vocations during this period must be attentive to evolving configurations of family, state, and church and consider "the fundamental tensions . . . between the interests of the individual and those of the family at large; between spiritual and secular values; and even between ecclesiastical and secular authorities."[50] Her counsel to historians remains as helpful as ever.

[49] Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children."

[50] Ibid., 307.

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