

Topic 2.4: Wars of Religion

OVERVIEW

As Protestantism spread across parts of Northern and Western Europe, religious conversions created new rifts between monarchs and local nobles, resulting in military conflicts that included the **French Wars of Religion** (1562-1598) and the **Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represented the end of an era of religious conflict that had been ongoing since the start of the Reformation. The **Thirty Years' War** was the last major war in Europe that was fought primarily over religion. The **Peace of Westphalia** (1648) shifted the Balance of Power away from the Habsburg family and established the right of Christian religious minorities to practice their faith in private.

KEY TERMS

Huguenots

Huguenots were French Protestants who followed the teachings of John Calvin. The precise origin of this term is unknown. Huguenots were most prevalent in the southern and western regions of France.

Politique

During the French Wars of Religion, *politiques* favored a policy of placing the good of the French state ahead of religious disagreements. Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism and France's intervention in the Thirty Years' War are examples of *politique*.

Defenestration

This word literally describes the act of throwing someone out of a window. The Thirty Years' War began with the **Defenestration of Prague**, which has arguably spawned more memes than any event in the history of Europe. It has been rumored that forgetting this word could automatically result in a failing score on your exam.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The *Thirty Years' War* represented **continuity** in European warfare because...

The Thirty Years' War began because of a religious dispute in the Holy Roman Empire. Religious differences were often a cause of conflict during the Reformation era.

The *Thirty Years' War* represented a **change** in European warfare because...

France's intervention on the side of the Protestants transformed the Thirty Years' War into a war to alter the **balance of power**, which effectively ended the use of religion as a pretext to warfare in Europe.

© Marco Learning, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Advanced Placement® and AP® are trademarks registered by the College Board, which is not affiliated with, and does not endorse, this product.

FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

By the mid-sixteenth century, Calvinism had spread beyond Switzerland to neighboring France. French Calvinists, known as **Huguenots**, included leaders of several powerful noble families from the southern and western regions of France.

Initially, **Catherine de' Medici**, who ruled France as queen regent on behalf of her minor son, tried to accommodate the Huguenots with limited toleration, but she and her son later saw the Huguenots as a threat and sided with the Catholics. While several Protestant nobles were in Paris for a wedding in 1572, Catholics killed thousands of Protestants in what became known as the **St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre**.

When the French king died without an heir in 1589, the throne passed to Henry of Navarre, a leader of the Huguenot faction, who reigned as **Henry IV**. In order to end the bloodshed and secure his kingdom, Henry converted to Catholicism, reportedly saying, "Paris is worth a Mass," establishing Henry as a **politique**. Henry then issued the **Edict of Nantes**, which granted toleration to French Huguenots and ended the French Wars of Religion.



Henry IV of France, depicted as Hercules

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

In 1618, Protestants in Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic), upset at their Habsburg ruler's decision to restrict the liberties of Protestants in his dominions, threw three Catholics out of a window in what is known as the **Defenestration of Prague**. This incident began the Thirty Years' War, the final, as well as the bloodiest, religious war of the Reformation.



Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden

During the war's Bohemian and Danish phases, the war largely remained within the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholics had the upper hand. In 1630, **Gustavus Adolphus**, the Lutheran King of Sweden, entered the conflict on behalf of the Protestants, gaining several victories using new innovations in military tactics, such as mobile artillery. After Gustavus Adolphus was killed in battle, France, a Catholic country, threw its full support behind the Protestants. With France's *politique*-inspired intervention on the Protestant side, the Thirty Years' War transformed from a religious war within the Holy Roman Empire to a political war between the Habsburgs and Bourbon France over the balance of power in Europe.

The **Peace of Westphalia** (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War, reduced the control that the Habsburg emperors had over the principalities of the Holy Roman Empire and allowed local rulers to choose Calvinism as a religion in addition to Catholicism and Lutheranism. Freedom of private worship was guaranteed to all Christians in the Holy Roman Empire.

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

In the Dutch Republic, where Calvinism was established as the state religion, Jews had complete freedom of worship and non-Calvinist Christians were allowed to practice their religions in private. The Dutch also welcomed persecuted Calvinists from other parts of Europe. Before they sailed across the Atlantic in the Mayflower to start the Plymouth Colony, the Pilgrims, lived for a time in the Dutch city of Leiden.