

CHAPTER 4

THE WARS OF RELIGION

4.1 THEMES

The period from approximately 1560 to 1648 witnessed continuing warfare, primarily between Protestants and Catholics. Though religion was not the only reason for the wars—occasionally Catholics and Protestants were allies—religion was the dominant cause of the bloodshed. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the fighting was along the Atlantic seaboard between Calvinists and Catholics; after 1600, the warfare spread to Germany where Calvinists, Lutherans, and Catholics fought.

4.2 WARFARE

4.2.1 *Effects of Gunpowder*

Cannons became effective and therefore elaborate and expensive fortifications of cities were required. Long sieges became necessary to capture a city.

The infantry, organized in squares of three thousand men and armed with pikes and muskets, made the cavalry charge obsolete.

4.2.2 *Discipline*

Greater discipline and control of armies were required to sustain a siege or train the infantry. An army once trained would not be disbanded due to the expense of retraining. The order of command and modern ranks appeared, as did uniforms.

The better discipline permitted commanders to attempt more actions on the battlefield, so more soldiers were necessary. Armies grew from the 40,000 of the Spanish army of 1600 to 400,000 in the French army at the end of the seventeenth century.

4.2.3 *War and Destruction*

Devastation of the enemy's lands became the rule. Armies, mostly made up of mercenaries, lived by pillage when not paid and often were not effectively under the control of the ruler employing them. Peasants, after such devastation and torture to reveal their valuables, left farming and turned to banditry.

4.3 THE CATHOLIC CRUSADE

4.3.1 *Philip II (1556 – 98)*

The territories of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, were divided in 1556 between Ferdinand, Charles' brother, and Philip, Charles' son. Ferdinand received Austria, Hungary, Bohemia and the title of Holy Roman Emperor. Philip received Spain, Milan, Naples, the Netherlands, and the New World.

Both parts of the Hapsburg family cooperated in international matters.

Philip was a man of severe personal habits, deeply religious, and a hard worker. Solemn (it is said he only laughed once in his life, when the report of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre reached him) and reclusive (he built the Escorial outside Madrid as a palace, monastery and eventual tomb), he devoted his life and the wealth of Spain to making Europe Catholic. It was Philip, not the pope, who led the Catholic attack on Protestants. The pope and the Jesuits, however, did participate in Philip's efforts.

4.3.2 Sources of the Power of Philip II

The gold and silver of the New World flowed into Spain, especially following the opening of the silver mines at Potosi in Peru.

Spain dominated the Mediterranean following a series of wars led by Philip's half-brother, Don John, against Moslem (largely Turkish) forces. Don John secured the Mediterranean for Christian merchants with a naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto off the coast of Greece in 1571.

Portugal was annexed by Spain in 1580 following the death of the king without a clear successor. This gave Philip the only other large navy of the day as well as Portuguese territories around the globe.

4.3.3 Nature of the Struggle

Calvinism was spreading in England, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Calvinists supported each other, often disregarding their countries' borders.

England was ruled by two queens, Mary (1553 – 58), who married Philip II, and then Elizabeth (1558 – 1603), while three successive kings of France from 1559 to 1589 were influenced by their mother, Catherine de' Medici.

Monarchs attempted to strengthen their control and the unity of their countries, a process which nobles often resisted.

4.4 CIVIL WAR IN FRANCE

4.4.1 *Background*

Francis I (1515 – 47) obtained control of the French church, when he signed the Concordat of Bologna with the pope, and therefore had no incentive to encourage Protestantism.

With the signing of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis in 1559, the struggles of the Hapsburgs and Valois ended, leaving the French with no fear of outside invasion for a while.

John Calvin was a Frenchman and Geneva was near France, so Calvinist ideas spread in France, especially among the nobility. French Calvinists were sometimes called Huguenots.

Three noble families—Bourbon, Chatillon, and Guise—sought more power and attempted to dominate the monarchs after 1559. Partly due to politics, the Bourbons and Chatillons became Calvinists.

When Henry II (1547 – 59) died as a result of injuries sustained in a tournament, he was succeeded by his three sons [Francis II (1559 – 60), Charles IX (1560 – 74), and Henry III (1571 – 89)]. They were heavily influenced by their mother, Catherine de' Medici (1519 – 89), and often controlled by one of the

noble families. Though the monarch was always Catholic until 1589, each king was willing to work with Calvinists or Catholics if it would give him more power and independence.

4.4.2 *The Wars*

A total of nine civil wars occurred from 1562 to 1589. The wars became more brutal as killing of civilians supplanted military action.

The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre on August 24, 1572, was planned by Catherine de' Medici and resulted in the deaths of 20,000 Huguenots. The pope had a medal struck celebrating the event and the king of Spain, Philip II, laughed when told of the massacre.

As a result of St. Bartholomew's Day and other killings, Protestants throughout Europe feared for their future.

Several important figures were assassinated by their religious opponents, including two kings (Henry III and Henry IV). The two leading members of the Guise family were killed at the instigation of the king, Henry III, in 1588.

Spain intervened with troops to support the Catholics in 1590.

4.4.3 *Henry of Navarre (1589 – 1610)*

A Calvinist and member of the Bourbon family, Henry of Navarre became king in 1589 when Henry III was assassinated. Personally popular, Henry began to unite France but was unable to conquer or control Paris, center of Catholic strength. In 1593 he converted to Catholicism saying "Paris is worth a mass."

In this respect, he was a *politique*, more interested in political unity than religious uniformity.

In 1589 Henry issued the Edict of Nantes which permitted Huguenots to worship publicly, to have access to the universities and to public office, and to maintain fortified towns in France to protect themselves. The Edict was not a recognition of the advantages of religious tolerance so much as it was a truce in the religious wars.

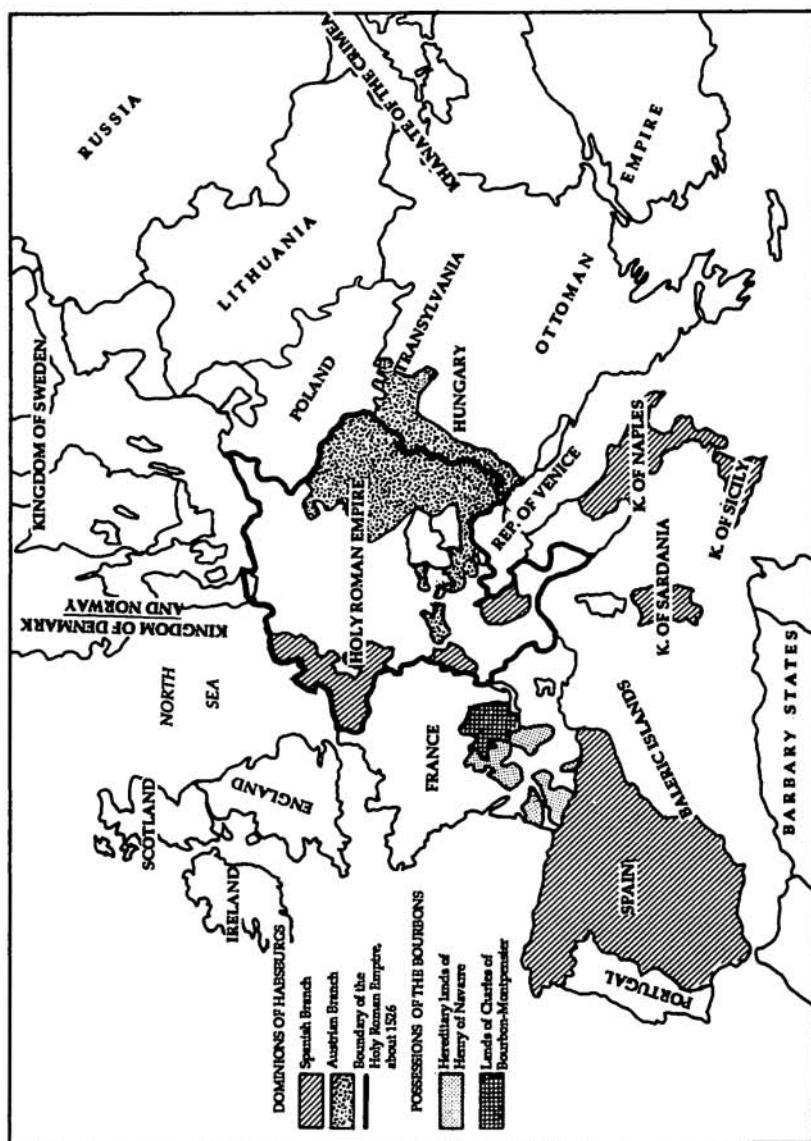
4.5 THE REVOLT OF THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands was a group of seventeen provinces clustered around the mouth of the Rhine and ruled by the king of Spain. Each province had a tradition of some independence and each elected a *stadholder*, a man who provided military leadership when necessary. The stadholder often was an important noble and often became the most important politician in the province.

Since the Middle Ages the Netherlands had included many cities dominated by wealthy merchants. By 1560 the cities housed many Calvinists, including some who had fled from France.

Philip II, king of Spain, sought to impose a more centralized government on the Netherlands and a stronger Catholic church, following the decrees of the Council of Trent, on the inhabitants. Philip's efforts provoked resistance by some nobles, led by William of Orange (1533 – 84), called "the Silent" because he discussed his political plans with very few people. An agreement and pledge to resist, called the Compromise of 1564 and signed by people throughout the provinces, led to rebellion.

EUROPE IN 1559



Philip sent the Duke of Alva (1508 – 1583) with 20,000 soldiers to suppress the rebellion. Alva established the Council of Troubles (called the Council of Blood by its opponents) which executed several thousand Calvinists as heretics. Alva also imposed new taxes, including a sales tax of 10%. Most significantly, the Inquisition was established.

The resistance to Alva included groups of sailors, called Sea Beggars, and the opening of the dykes to frustrate the marches of the Spanish armies. In 1576 the Spanish army, unpaid, sacked Antwerp, an event called the Spanish Fury and which destroyed Antwerp's commercial supremacy in the Netherlands.

The Calvinist northern provinces and the Catholic southern provinces united in 1576 in the Pacification of Ghent, but were unable to cooperate and broke apart into two religious groups: the Calvinist Union of Utrecht (approximately modern day Netherlands) and the Catholic Union of Arras (approximately modern day Belgium).

International attention was attracted when a son of Catherine de' Medici attempted to become the leader of the revolt and when the English sent troops and money to support the rebels after 1585.

The Spanish were driven out of the northern Netherlands in the 1590's, and the war ended in 1609, though official independence was not recognized by Spain until 1648. Thereafter, the independent northern provinces, dominated by the province of Holland, were called the United Provinces and the southern provinces, ruled by the king of Spain, the Spanish Netherlands.

4.6 ENGLAND AND SPAIN

4.6.1 *Mary* (1553 – 58)

The daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, Mary sought to make England Catholic. She executed many Protestants, earning her the name “Bloody Mary” from her opponents.

To escape persecution, many of the English went into exile on the Continent where, settling in Frankfurt, Geneva, and elsewhere, they learned more radical Protestant ideas.

Cardinal Pole (1500 – 58) was one of Mary’s advisers and symbolized the subordination of England to the pope.

Mary married Philip II, king of Spain, and organized her foreign policy around Spanish interests. They had no children.

4.6.2 *Elizabeth* (1558 – 1603)

A Protestant, though one of unknown beliefs, Elizabeth achieved a religious settlement between 1559 and 1563 which left England with a church governed by bishops and practicing Catholic rituals, but maintaining a Calvinist doctrine. This was seen as a *via media*—a middle way between extremes—by its supporters; or an impossible compromise of Protestantism and Catholicism by its opponents.

Puritans sought to purify the English church of the remnants of its medieval heritage and, though suppressed by Elizabeth’s government, were not condemned to death.

Catholics, who sought to return the English church to an allegiance to the pope, participated in several rebellions and plots. Mary, Queen of Scots, had fled to England from Scotland in 1568 after alienating the nobles there and was, in Catholic

eyes, the legitimate queen of England. Several plots and rebellions to put Mary on the throne led to her execution in 1587.

Elizabeth was formally excommunicated by the pope in 1570.

In 1588, as part of his crusade and to stop England from supporting the rebels in the Netherlands, Philip II sent the Armada, a fleet of over 125 ships, to convey troops from the Netherlands to England as part of a plan to make England Catholic. The Armada was defeated by a combination of superior English naval tactics and a wind which made it impossible for the Spanish to accomplish their goal.

Peace between Spain and England was signed in 1604. England remained Protestant and an opponent of Spain as long as Spain remained a world power.

4.7 THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

4.7.1 *Background*

Calvinism was spreading throughout Germany. The Peace of Augsburg, which settled the disputes between Lutherans and Catholics in 1555, had no provision for Calvinists. Lutherans gained more territories through conversions and often took control of previously church states—a violation of the Peace of Augsburg. A Protestant alliance under the leadership of the Calvinist ruler of the Palatinate opposed a Catholic League led by the ruler of Bavaria.

4.7.2 *The Bohemian Period (1618 – 25)*

The Bohemians rejected a Hapsburg as their king in favor

of the Calvinist ruler of Palatinate, Frederick. They threw two Hapsburg officials out a window—the “defenestration of Prague.”

Frederick’s army was defeated at White Mountain in 1620, Bohemia was made Catholic, and the Spanish occupied Frederick’s Palatinate.

4.7.3 *The Danish Period (1625 – 29)*

The army of Ferdinand, the Holy Roman Emperor, invaded northern Germany and raised fear among Protestants for their religion and local rulers for their political rights. Christian IV (1588 – 1648), king of Denmark, led an army into Germany in defense of Protestants but was easily defeated. After defeating Christian, the Holy Roman Emperor sought to recover all church lands secularized since 1552 and establish a strong Hapsburg presence in northern Germany.

4.7.4 *The Swedish Period (1629 – 35)*

Gustavus Adolphus (1611 – 32), king of Sweden, supported by money from France and the United Provinces who wanted the Hapsburgs defeated, invaded Germany in defense of Protestantism. Sweden stopped the Hapsburg cause in the battle of Breitenfeld in 1630, but Gustavus Adolphus was killed at the battle of Lutzen in 1632.

4.7.5 *The Swedish-French Period (1635 – 48)*

France, guided by Cardinal Richelieu (1585 – 1642), supplied troops in Germany as the war became part of a bigger war between France and Spain.

4.7.6 *Treaty of Westphalia (1648)*

The presence of ambassadors from all the belligerents and many other countries made settlement of nearly all disputes possible. Only the French-Spanish war continued, ending in 1659.

The principles of the Peace of Augsburg were reasserted, but with Calvinists included. The pope's rejection of the treaty was ignored.

The independence of the United Provinces from the king of Spain and the Swiss Confederacy from the Holy Roman Empire was recognized. Individual German states, numbering over three hundred, obtained nearly complete independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

4.7.7 *Miscellaneous*

Not all issues were ones of Protestants versus Catholics. The Lutheran ruler of Saxony joined the Catholics in the attack on Frederick at White Mountain and the leading general for the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand, was Albrecht of Wallenstein, a Protestant.

The war brought great destruction to Germany, leading to a decline in population of perhaps one-third, more in some areas. Germany remained divided and without a strong government until the nineteenth century.

4.8 RESULTS

After 1648, warfare, though often with religious elements, would not be primarily for religious goals.

The Catholic crusade to reunite Europe failed, largely due to the efforts of the Calvinists. The religious distribution of Europe has not changed significantly since 1648.

Nobles, resisting the increasing power of the state, usually dominated the struggle. France, then Germany, fell apart due to the wars. France was reunited in the seventeenth century; Germany was not.

In most political entities, politics, such as Elizabeth I of England and Henry IV of France, who sought more to keep the state united than to insure that a single religion dominated, came to control politics.

The branches of the Hapsburg family, the Austrian and the Spanish, continued to cooperate in international affairs. Spain, though a formidable military power until 1648, began a decline which ended its role as a great power of Europe.

