Understanding that Passeth Belief:  
Evidence of Doctrinal Comprehension among  
Protestants in the Revocation Era  

Christie Sample Wilson  
St. Edward's University  

In March 1654 a new family of French Protestants began when Jacques Bruyere, a laborer, married Margueritte. In September they welcomed their first daughter, Jeanne. In October they presented her at the temple to be baptized by the local minister, Reverend de la Faye. In the following years the young family grew to include five more children, each taken to Reverend de la Faye to receive the sacrament of baptism, some quickly, others after a delay of almost a month. Their Catholic neighbors did likewise, celebrating every birth by taking the child to the local priest for baptism. For example, in 1672 a new Catholic family began with the marriage of Jacques Chambon, a member of the town council, to Marianne. They, too, had several children who were dutifully presented for baptism, each within four days of birth.

These families lived in Loriol, a town of under 2,000 inhabitants, approximately three-quarters of whom were Protestant. The collective experience of these Protestants provides a window onto the intersection of belief and behavior under the personal rule of Louis XIV, particularly the degree to which Protestants living through the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes accepted and acted on the teachings of leading ministers. They behaved in ways
that indicate a sophisticated internalization of church teachings. This internalization allowed them to negotiate compliance with Catholicism in ways that minimized the degree to which they compromised their beliefs. In their behaviors at crucial junctures in life we can see evidence that the confessionalization that characterized many bi-confessional communities by the late seventeenth century continued past the Revocation, shaping the behaviors of future generations descended from pre-Revocation Protestants.

The actions of these families and hundreds of others in the second half of the seventeenth century provide indications of the beliefs of Protestants and Catholics in the years surrounding the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Religious belief made a difference in how people lived their lives. Religion taught them that certain acts were necessary for salvation, and they worked to ensure that they and their children met at least the minimum requirements to achieve that end. Philip Benedict and Gregory Hanlon have documented the ways in which belief systems and the demands of a Church influenced individual and personal decisions in seventeenth-century France. The parish registers of Loriol offer further evidence of this influence.

The behaviors of Protestants and Catholics prior to the Revocation clearly indicate that the people of Loriol acted on the basis of their belief systems and that these actions differed, as one would expect based on the teachings of each confession. The Revocation necessitated changes in

religious behavior, but these changes did not always reflect the dictates of post-Tridentine Catholicism. Registers show distinct changes in Protestant behavior in keeping with the conversion of all former Protestants to Catholicism and their faithful participation in their new Church, as the Revocation mandated. Not all of the changes made by the new converts were directly contrary to Protestant teachings, however. The faithfulness of the people of Loriol to the teachings of their confession suggests a deep comprehension of the requirements of their confession and the expectations of the post-Revocation Catholic Church. Even when there was no longer a temple to reinforce and nurture these beliefs, there were changes that they were unwilling to make, indicating a continued allegiance to pre-Revocation beliefs.

Bringing a child to the church for baptism was perhaps the most important act a new parent performed, and it was expected of all parents. There were two key points of agreement in the position of each confession: that baptism was a sacrament and that babies should be baptized before they died. The timing of this act was, however, confessionally significant. Protestant behaviors at this crucial point reflect Calvinist understanding of the nature and role of sacraments as explained in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin believed that faith was based on a personal relationship between God and the individual and that salvation was a gift of God's grace that could not be earned. With these basic tenets established, Calvin set out guidelines for the proper practice of faith and explained the meaning behind the different forms of religious expression. For baptism, his understanding of "sacrament" was key. Calvin defined a sacrament as

an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the
weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men.\(^2\)

While a very important part of the Christian life, a sacrament was not an act that created a relationship or a compact between the individual and God. For Calvin and his followers the sacraments were important as outward affirmations before God, oneself, and the community of this covenant. Sacraments symbolized the grace and mercy of God, which could only be fully understood by those who heard and received the sacrament with faith.

The understanding that a sacrament was an affirmation rather than an act necessary to receive God's grace shaped the ways in which French Protestants responded to the birth of a baby. The baby did not have to be baptized in order to experience God's grace and, therefore, to receive salvation. Baptism was not the starting point for a relationship with God; rather it was

the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being engrafted into Christ we may be accounted children of God. Moreover, the end for which God has given it . . . is, first that it may be conducive to our faith in him; and, secondly, that it may serve the purpose of confession among men. . . . the knowledge and certainty of such gifts [ablution and salvation] are perceived in this sacrament.\(^3\)

The practical result of this teaching was that it was not critical for parents to get their newborn children to the temple for baptism immediately after birth. Failure to have


\(^3\) Ibid., 2:513.
a child baptized did not negate that child's relationship with God, although the role of the sacrament for the initiation into the fellowship of believers was very important.

The Geneva catechism underscored the need for baptism by describing baptism as a visible seal, like circumcision, "and without it an injury was done to the child, they have diminished privileges." The nature of these diminished privileges was not specified, nor was the nature of the injury to the child. The behavior of French Protestant parents shows that they understood the need and expectation for baptism as well as the implications with regard to the timing of the sacrament. Parents in Loriol did bring babies to the temple, though not always with great speed. When there was danger of imminent death, however, a child was likely to be baptized much more quickly.

The Protestant parents of Loriol understood both the overall assertion that baptism was not necessary for salvation and the nuance that it was a positive good to a child. Parish register data indicate that in the decades before the Revocation parents from this congregation consistently waited several days to over a month following birth before bringing their infant to the temple. Between 1650 and 1680 the congregation in Loriol was relatively free from interference concerning religious behaviors. In these years sixty percent of the children baptized were brought to the temple a week or more after their birth.

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5 All parish register data from the Protestant congregation of Loriol is in the Archives départementales de la Drôme [hereafter ADD], box 6 E 19.
Table 1:
Average Delay for Protestant Children
between Birth and Baptism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Baptisms*</th>
<th>Mean Delay</th>
<th>Median Delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1650-59</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>19 days</td>
<td>13 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1660-69</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>16 days</td>
<td>10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1670-79</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>14 days</td>
<td>9 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only those baptisms with full information about the date of birth and baptism are included here.

The table shows that there was a decrease in the average delay over these decades. While more than half of all baptisms were more than thirteen days after birth in the 1650s, this number was reduced to nine days by the 1670s. The compression of the mean and median delay indicates that the number of extremely long delays decreased while the entire population continued to wait over a week to baptize their children. While the data do not replace a personal account in which a believer describes how and why he made the decision to wait, they do clearly signify that Loriol's parents were confident that their children were getting the proper care with regard to the role of baptism in the faith of the child.

By contrast, their Catholic neighbors brought their children to the church much more quickly to be baptized. Catholic doctrine taught that baptism was essential for salvation, making it imperative that parents bring their children to the church for the sacrament as soon as possible. The expectation was that a child would be baptized within two days of birth. By the 1680s the average delay between birth and baptism was only two and a half days, down from eight and a half in the 1670s. The earlier long delay represented a less than adequate adherence to
Catholic teachings and suggests that the minority Catholic population may have adopted more Protestant attitudes toward this issue over the course of the seventeenth century, a deviation largely addressed by the 1680s. This change in behavior probably reflects the campaign against Protestants and behaviors associated with Protestants that increased markedly in the 1680s, perhaps represented in Loriol by the arrival of a new Catholic priest in the mid-1670s.

Given the importance that both confessions placed on baptism, it is no surprise that parents in Loriol were concerned about securing it for the most vulnerable babies. In the Protestant community, this concern manifested itself in the tendency of parents to take weaker newborns to the temple more quickly than they took other, less fragile children. Parents of twins tended to bring them for baptism almost immediately. While Mary and Antoinette had waited as long as a month to bring their singleton babies to the temple for baptism, they brought their twins the day after their births. Others repeated this pattern of behavior in the Protestant community. However, there are also records in the Protestant registers of babies who died without the benefit of baptism. Although these entries are uncommon, they appear in the burial register throughout the pre-Revocation period. The registers list these infants as dying without a name and without a baptism. There is no indication of the sort of provisional baptism by a midwife that appears in the Catholic registers. The failure to take even this minimal measure speaks to the belief that immediate baptism was not absolutely necessary in the eyes of their Church.

In the Catholic community, parents showed a different response to the birth of a baby whose health seemed precarious. Between 1674 and 1684 almost eight percent of
babies born to Catholic parents received a provisional baptism by the midwife; the priest then confirmed this baptism if the child survived. These behaviors indicate the conviction that baptism was necessary for salvation. While Catholic parents waited longer than their Church instructed them to on average, their actions with regard to the most vulnerable babies speaks to their commitment to securing salvation for their children.

The people of Loriol also demonstrated their understanding of the confessionally distinct religious requirements associated with marriage prior to the Revocation. For the Protestant population, marriage was not a sacrament; rather it was an institution of God, an "external ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise." As such, marriage should be available to all, even to the clergy, and without calendrical restrictions. Conversely, the Catholic Church held that marriage was indeed a sacrament, a position that was upheld by the Council of Trent and enumerated in twelve canons with anathemas concerning marriage. Catholic marriage was restricted during the holy seasons of Lent and Advent. Given these differences, confessionally specific marriage patterns should be easy to spot.

Benedict has demonstrated that Protestants throughout France showed little or no tendency to avoid marriage during Lent and Advent despite the prohibition of Lenten marriages in the Edict of Nantes and in subsequent laws.

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6 Calvin, Institutes, 2:647.
8 Benedict, Huguenot Population of France, 80.
9 See Philip Benedict, The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-1685 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 300; and
This pattern generally held true in Loriol. Between 1650 and 1684 over five percent of all Protestant marriages took place in March, which roughly corresponds with Lent, and almost eleven percent of marriages were celebrated in December, which roughly corresponds with Advent. Thus, while marriages were not evenly distributed throughout the year, there was not an overwhelming tendency to avoid marriage during these religious seasons. In the years immediately preceding the Revocation, the number of marriages was more evenly distributed throughout the year. Their Catholic neighbors were not much more observant of their Church's prohibition of marriage during these seasons, with almost ten percent of marriages between 1660 and 1684 taking place in March, though only one percent were celebrated in December. These marriages in Lent and Advent all took place before the arrival of a new priest in 1675, suggesting that at least part of the issue was a failure to enforce the prohibition on the part of the local clergy.

A final measure of the confessional boundary in Loriol is intermarriage, perhaps the most significant indicator of the degree of separation between the confessions. As pressure to abandon Protestantism grew after the 1660s, the Catholic registers are the best source of information about conversion of one potential partner in order to marry a Catholic. The register in Loriol contains scarce reference to a conversion that was then followed by a marriage. The confessional divide with regard to marriage was solid.

These data suggest that the people of Loriol understood, or could be made to understand, the teachings of their respective religions. This comprehension is reflected in their interactions with their churches as they baptized their children and married. These patterns of behavior fit into the

As the Revocation neared, people living in biconfessional areas were justifiably concerned with the implications of the new political and religious order. Throughout the 1680s French Protestants were required to convert and to participate in the Catholic Church, and Catholic Churches were required to integrate these new converts into their parishes. That the efforts to transform faithful Protestants into faithful Catholics were a failure is well documented and is evidenced by the formation of synods following Louis XIV’s death and the reemergence of a Reformed community in eighteenth-century France.11

Analysis of the changes in behavior after the Revocation suggests that the population of former Protestants was sufficiently committed to the teachings of their confession to know what was acceptable and what was not. In Loriol the Protestant community opted to meet the minimal requirements in order to avoid unwanted attention and persecution. Evidence that many former Protestants made compromises with the new order and participated, however unwillingly and unfaithfully, in the Catholic Church is clear from the parish registers. At the same time, their behaviors did not directly contradict the expectations of their Protestant confession. When they were pushed to more than minimal compliance with the

10 For some of the recent work in the growing literature on confessionalization see Philip Benedict, Faith and Fortunes; Hanlon; Luria; and Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr., Blood and Belief: Family Survival and Confessional Identity among the Provincial Huguenot Nobility (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1994).
directives of the Catholic Church, however, they were unwilling to compromise. Thus, there were accommodations when it came to conversions, the timing of baptism, and the seasonality of marriage. At the same time they resisted the level of participation that would allow for intermarriage in the Catholic Church.

While there were conversions in Loriol, there were not nearly enough for the number of Protestants in town. The failure to convert did not, however, keep individuals from being known as new converts or participating in the sacraments of baptism and marriage in the Catholic Church. There was an immediate increase in the number of these sacraments performed, although the numbers of baptisms and marriages were well short of the total from both Churches in the pre-Revocation years. Some of the new participants in Catholic rituals had officially abjured Protestantism, but many had not. Many of those who came to the Catholic Church for a baptism had previously baptized an infant in the Protestant temple. Others, who had themselves been baptized in the temple, came to the Catholic Church to marry and later to baptize their children.

The years between 1685 and 1715 saw changed behaviors regarding baptism on the part of the entire population of Loriol.12 As the following chart demonstrates, the delay between birth and baptism for those children brought to the Catholic Church was very short in the post-Revocation years, especially compared to the long delay for Protestant parents prior to 1685. It was even reduced compared to the average delay for Catholic parents prior to the 1680s.

12 The original parish registers are stored in ADD, 4E1673. A copy is available from the Family History Center, microfilm 0614853.
Table 2
Average Delay Between Birth and Baptism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Baptisms</th>
<th>Average Delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1685-1689</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1690-1699</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1714</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>1.5 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The experience with regard to marriage tells a similar story of basic, if not perfect, compliance on the part of the newly integrated congregation. In the years immediately following the Revocation, marriages in March made up eight percent of the total number celebrated, while December marriages were two percent of the total. These figures fell to two percent and none between 1700 and 1715.

The picture of substantial adherence to the teachings of the Catholic Church holds when one breaks these numbers down further to examine the behavior of those who were Protestant and Catholic prior to the Revocation. By 1715 the average delay between birth and baptism for a child who had either two new converts as parents or who had one newly converted parent and one parent whose confessional background could not be identified was under one and a half days. This delay was down from over two and a half days in the 1690s. Children with either two old Catholic parents or one old Catholic parent and one parent whose confessional background could not be determined experienced a delay of almost two days in the 1690s but less than one and a half by 1714. For children with one new convert parent and one old Catholic parent the average delay was under one and a half days in both periods. These figures suggest that the confessionally distinct behaviors
with regard to baptism from the pre-Revocation era had largely disappeared by 1714.

The seasonality of marriage also shows that by 1715 the new converts had modified their behavior so that it complied with the expectations of the Catholic Church. After 1700 only two percent of former Protestants married in March and December, down from eight percent in the 1690s. However, fewer people were marrying in the Catholic Church than were baptizing their babies there; as the number of baptisms rose, the number of marriages fell.

Certainly these figures include some in Loriol who were truly converted to Catholicism or at least whose children or grandchildren would be true converts.\textsuperscript{13} Not everyone was putting on a façade to avoid the consequences of revealing their true beliefs. A significant portion of the population was, however, compromising in some respects while holding on to their Protestant beliefs. The fact that families came to meet the expectations of the Catholic Church with regard to the sacraments of baptism and marriage did not necessarily indicate that they experienced true conversion, nor did their behavior with regard to these two sacraments indicate that they participated in the others.

Intermarriage patterns reveal evidence of failure to participate in sacraments. While there were very few marriages in the pre-Revocation Catholic Church for which one partner converted, there were several intermarriages in the years that followed the Revocation. Between 1690 and 1699 there were fifteen marriages between people who

\textsuperscript{13} Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, "Minority Survival: The Huguenot Paradigm in France and the Diaspora" in Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora, eds. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 5.

\textit{Proceedings of the Western Society for French History}
could be identified as Catholic and Protestant. These constituted half of all marriages in which both partners could be identified and fifteen percent of all marriages celebrated in these years. In the period from 1700 to 1715 the number of mixed marriages fell to only five, representing just ten percent of marriages in which both partners could be identified and only three percent of all marriages performed. These statistics, like the figures for baptism, suggest a change at the turn of the century.

On the local level, the changes in behavior around 1700 coincide with the arrival of a new priest, Father Jauffret. The timing of the change makes an alteration in clerical policy likely. While Protestants previously might have been able to get by with modified behavior that did not blatantly violate the requirements of the Catholic Church, they were evidently unable to meet the threshold of proper participation set by the new priest. The increase in baptisms matched with the relative decrease in marriages and the marked decline in mixed marriages suggest that Father Jauffret required that people do more than nominally participate. Presumably, attending services and taking the sacrament regularly became necessary. This level of participation evidently proved unpalatable to the former Protestants who chose to live outside the Church.  

The changes in behavior outlined here speak to the degree to which the former Protestants of this community worked to avoid conflict, at least with provincial and royal officials. They modified their behavior to fit the minimum expectations of the Church. Their behavioral modifications did not, however, conflict with the requirements of Calvinism. Baptism was a sacrament for Protestants and

14 Mentzer describes this phenomenon among the Lacger family, noting the importance of the priest's degree of diligence in requiring full participation in order to marry in the church (175-9).
Catholics, although they disagreed on its significance. Both faiths believed it was important, and both believed it was essential that a clergyman administer it. Calvin specifically stated that "it is improper for private individuals to take upon themselves the administration of baptism; for it . . . is part of the ministerial office."\textsuperscript{15} By baptizing their infants quickly, the new converts did not violate Calvin's teachings, although their faith did not require such quick action. Even the son of the former Protestant minister brought his children to the Catholic Church for baptism, on average within two days of their birth. While a good Calvinist couple would surely shudder at the necessity of a Roman baptism for their child, they nonetheless deemed baptism necessary, and having it performed quickly was a minor concession in the name of maintaining the peace.

Marriage was a different issue for the former Protestants. Because marriage was not considered a sacrament in their faith, many likely saw marriage in the Church as unnecessary given the new conditions after the Revocation. Some may have ventured to Orange or Geneva to marry in a Calvinist church, as was probably the case with the minister's son. If a couple were to marry in the Catholic Church, they could safely comply with the Catholic prohibitions on Lent and Advent marriages. Beyond the general admonition to avoid papist superstitions, nothing in Protestantism required weddings during these periods.

The experience of one family illustrates the kind of accommodations that Protestants made in order to appear faithful Catholics. Margueritte Seguin and Jacques Boissonier married as Catholics in Loriol in June 1692. Both had been baptized in the Protestant temple, and

\textsuperscript{15} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2:524.
neither officially abjured Protestantism. They had four children, all of whom were baptized in the Catholic Church either on the day of their birth or the following day. These measures suggest that they had become faithful Catholics, fulfilling the promise and hope of the Revocation. Their failure to become true Catholics was obvious when Margueritte died. In May of 1730 Jacques came to the local priest to inform him of her death. The priest, however, did not consider her a good Catholic; he merely noted that she died outside of the Church.

These experiences suggest willingness to compromise on the part of both the former Protestants and the local priest. They also show, however, that this willingness had limits. Protestants would adjust to the new realities with regard to baptism and marriage but were unwilling to cross over into full participation in the Catholic Church in order to marry there. The priest was willing to tolerate Protestants in his midst, but he would not allow those who were Catholic in name only to marry or to die in the church. The behavior of Loriol's Protestants shows that they had internalized the teachings of their confession. They were able to find avenues by which they could modify their behavior to meet the current situation while not compromising on issues that would unacceptably violate their consciences.