St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre: The Involvement of Catherine de Medici as Central Figure in the Slaughter of the French Huguenots

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Thomas E. Mischler
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Saint Meinrad College
St. Meinrad, Indiana

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Introduction

History is permeated with violent events. This research paper takes a close look at one of them. The brutal slaughter of the French Huguenots at the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 was not a whim of the French monarchy. Quite the contrary, as this search will show, the massacre was the logical conclusion of a twelve year political struggle with religious overtones which mushrooms into a full scale blood bath. This struggle was composed of several parts, but their combined effects led directly to the massacre. The weakness of the Crown after Henry II's ironic death in 1559; internecine rivalry among the high nobility, especially the Guise, Bourbon, and Châtillon families; and the engagement of civil war: all played a vital role in the deadly outcome.

The central key to these incidents is the menacing figure of Catherine de Medici. While this research paper takes into account many particular episodes, its main focus is on Catherine's handling of these events. Her attempts to control this struggle are directly responsible for the massacre. Catherine's international and domestic policies, her concerns for her children, her thrist for power, and her Machiavellian influence all contribute to the ultimate event. Catherine de Medici is a central figure in the St. Bartholomew's Day

Chapter One

The years preceding the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 24, 1572 were filled with much intrigue. For twelve years, 1560-1572, due to unusual circumstances, France was caught in an ever choking net. That net was woven from power struggles, continous religious strife, sparse peace, attempts to arrange marriages among the royal courts of Europe, and involvement in the religious rebellion of the Netherlands. Each of these strands, in its own particular manner, shaped the events which ultimately led to the massacre. Though seemingly diverse, their inner relationships slowly entrapped the French Court and transformed a benevolent queen into an instigator of murder. Attempts at peace and religious harmony ended in butchery as conciliation turned into deep hatred.

The origins of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre could very well be traced back to Calvin himself and the beginnings of Calvinism, since the massacred Huguenots were simply French Calvinists. However, this does not insure that the event of August 24, 1572 would take place precisely as it did. The massacre was the result of events closer to home. The events from 1560 until 1572 molded the pattern which resulted in the massacre. Young Francis, son of King Henry II and Catherine

de Medici, came upon the French throne quite suddenly. While celebrating the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth to Philip II of Spain, Henry II relinquished his crown in a bizzare accident.[1] While jousting, Henry II was struck in the eye, a wound from which he died on July 10, 1559. This quirk of fate turned the whole situation around, for a young boy was now placed in a man's world with mansize problems to deal with. One of those problems resulted from his father's own dying words that his heir, Francis II, be placed into the hands of Philip II.[2]

Francis II's ascendancy to the throne was plagued with political strife. He was a sickly child of sixteen who according to French law could be crowned and rule for himself.[3] Francis II was only two years older than the proscribed age for self rule, besides his interests were elsewhere. The suddenness of his father's death left him untrained and ill-equipped to rule. His poor health made it difficult for him to oversee his duties. Emerging from this situation, there arose the power struggle between the Guises and the Bourbons. The focus of attention centered around religion with the fusion of religion and politics causing the crisis.[4] The Guise family, being strongly Catholic, favored the continuation of the Henry II's policy. They insisted that the Edict of Ecouen, July 10, 1559, be carried out, because it dealt with heretics.[5] The Huguenot Bourbons did not want the Guise to force Catholicism upon them, yet their attempts to stop the Guise offered little resistance. The Huguenots were a

formidable group once unified but they had no leader. Although Antione de Navarre was the first prince of the blood, he refused to lead the Huguenots, placing his concerns on the restoration of the Kingdom of Navarre.[6] His younger brother, the Prince of Condé, also refused believing that this leadership was too perilous and placed him in a compromised position.[7] With little opposition, the Guises oversaw the running of the government. In that capacity, they were able to build a governmental system to root out the constables and princes of the blood, thus making it possible to secure the Crown for their own family.[8]

With the Guise family making policy, the Huguenots planned to revolt as a means of survival. They were not about to stand by and watch a strong Catholic family force them out of France. In the search for a leader, the Huguenots found Godfrey de Barry, who had a special grievance against the Guise faction.[9] Godfrey de Barry sought revenge for the death of his brother-in-law. Having a leader to guide them, the Huguenot movement steadily grew. Meanwhile, other Huguenots attempted to break their bondage by calling for an Estates General. They hoped to overcome the powerful grip commanded by the Duke of Guise through interpretation of the law. However, this plan achieved little if any results and left the only recourse - a force of arms. This forced opposition was perfectly legal, provided that it was lead by a prince of the blood.[10] Unfortunately for the Huguenots, the princes of the blood dared not join. The Huguenot cause now rested on

Godfrey de Barry and French exiles returning home with the hope of bringing new freedom to their mother country. The Guises learned of this conspiracy and planned a counter attack. Military preparations were made disguised as an intervention force to be shipped to Scotland. In the midst of this plot, the de Guise suspicioned that Antione de Navarre and/or Louis, Prince of Condé, were involved.[11] In truth neither had any intention of becoming entangled in this uprising. Despite their non-involvement, Antione and Louis were arrested and charged with conspiracy.

Catherine de Medici at this time was in no position to speak out strongly, for her power of authority had not yet been firmly implanted. She hoped to hold the balance of power between the Huguenots and the Guise faction by playing each party against the other.[12] In doing so, Catherine made the first of several fatal mistakes. Her attempts to keep the Guises and the Bourbons in constant struggle totally left out the third major family in France, the Montomorency, the middle party. She was able to manoeuvre her double dealing for a while, but could not do it forever. The fatality occurred when the Catholic defense was solidified by Constable Montmorency's alliance with the Duke of Guise.[13]

Despite elaborate plans, fate had it's way of intervening. The struggles between the Guises and Bourbons temporarily came to a halt with the death of Francis II. December 5, 1560 marked another turning point in the journey toward the massacre.[14] Francis' weak reign was replaced by an even

weaker reign. Charles IX, being ten years old, was unable to rule effectively. However, this was Catherine de Medici's most opportune moment, because the death of Francis II allowed her to gain control of the seal, thus making her the keeper of the King's authority.[15] As it turned out, Antione de Navarre was actually the first in line to assume power, but his current state of arrest prevented him from pursuing the regency. This was a tragic turn of fate which John Calvin himself pointed to "...Unless the King of Navarre acts promptly, a mistake may be made which will be difficult to rectify...".[16] In order to control her authority, Catherine offered a deal with Antione and Louis of Condé. Realizing that she could manipulate the King of Navarre, who was still hoping to win back his Kingdom of Navarre, Catherine granted pardon of religious offenders freeing Antione and Louis, and entered into a dual regency with the King of Navarre.[17] Catherine de Medici slowly began to assert herself as the governing authority in France, an authority she watched with a keen eye. Her power grew in time, as she calculated her moves. The Prince of Condé posed no threat, for she knew she could keep him at bay with the lure of women. Her own maiden of the Court, Isabelle de Limeuil, kept Catherine supplied with information about the prince's doings.[18] Antione offered little resistance, for fear of losing his chance to regain Navarre. Even the Duke of Guise had slacked off, seeing that Catherine's policy, at least for the moment, was pro-Catholic.

Catherine de Medici intended to rule with a policy of

reconciliation and containment. Her mind was set on the prerequisite and the essential nature of peace. However, her intentions were delayed by other outside forces. Since Henry II's death the affinity between France and Spain by both marriage, Philip II and Elizabeth, and the treaty, Catceau-Cambrésis, April, 1559, had been broken.[19] The relationship between France and Spain was to be sure quite unstable. Catherine feared any reaction which Philip would take against France. Her plans for peace included international as well as domestic considerations, but these two were difficult to implement together. Far too often the wishes of Philip II contradicted Catherine's designs at home. While Philip II wanted Catholic doctrine restored throughout France, Catherine wished only to maintain a balance of power. The arrival of Don Juan de Manrique, bringing the official Spanish condolences for Francis II's death, heightened Catherine's fears.[20] Catherine realized the threat that Don Manrique posed to the crown. Her choice seemed clear, yet very much opposed. Either she granted toleration to the Huguenots or she faced a possible civil war enforcing the strict obedience of Catholicism. The menacing figure of an official Spanish envoy compelled her temporarily to choose the latter. Therefore, along with recent religious skirmishes, a stricter interdict on the Huguenots and their religious practices was introduced in April, 1561.[21] This crushed the Huguenots' hopes for reform, for they felt that a new King, especially one whose regency was partially governed by a Huguenot, would consent to their

demands. However, Catherine's strivings for peace and order soon caused her to abandon total fear of Spain. She now moved with caution to avoid colliding with Philip II, but she opted for toleration of the Huguenot religion, hoping to achieve conciliation.

During this confusion, Catherine had relied heavily upon two Huguenot organizers, Theodore Beza and Admiral Coligny de Chatillion.[22] This reliance had brought many Huguenots into the Court. From the standpoint of the Catholic leaders her contrivance with these heretics was outrageous. They feared that Catherine was slowly slipping into the hands of these heathens. Except for her brief interdict, Catherine's policies indicated a definite leaning toward the Huguenots. Fearing that the Huguenots would rally around the Crown, the Catholic leaders, Constable Montmorency, Constable Francois de Guise, and Marshal St. Andere, banded together to form the Triumvirate.[23] They quickly established goals to provide funds and forces which would be necessary to fight the Huguenots. They even appealed to Philip II for aid. At this point, Antione de Navarre joined the triumvirate, despite his Huguenot background. His main interest was again the Kingdom of Navarre which Philip II controled. Catherine de Medici was undaunted by the formation of the Triumvirate. She continued to stress the Huguenot cause, and drew even closer to Coligny who was earnestly loyal to the crown. Catherine turned toward Coligny as a result of her growing dislike of the Guise, whose plans invariably blocked the way to unity and restoration of

peace. Besides, Catherine knew she could work with Coligny, while the Duke of Guise and Philip II were threatening precisely because they were unworkable. This marked Catherine's second fatal mistake as she relied more and more on the help of the Huguenots to protect her from the Triumvirate.[24] During this time the Huguenots built up their military organization while animosity grew among the Catholics. In an attempt to settle the differences between the two religions, Catherine called a conference in August, 1561, known as the Colloquy of Poissy.[25] Pope Pius IV and Philip II took a keen interest in the outcome of this conference. Despite a major effort to come to grips with the problems, the conference bogged down and stagnated. With nothing settled, peace was disrupted and soon riots broke out among the Huguenots. Catherine was forced into action. In order to restore peace once again, the Edict of January, 1562 was issued.[26] The Huguenots were satisfied with the ability to exercise publicly their reformed religion. Although it was not approved as a new religion, the Huguenots were free to assemble anywhere but a consecrated church. This greatly angered the Catholic factions and would soon cause trouble.

The next eight years, 1562-1570, were marred by several outbreaks of religious war. A psuedo-peace between each of the three religious wars provided time for forces to regroup, then once again go after the others' throats. The first of these religious wars began when Francois de Guise ordered the massacre at Vassy on March 1, 1562. While on patrol Constable

de Guise and his men discovered a gathering of Huguenots in a barn listening to a Protestant sermon. Tension between the two parties mounted and a scuffle broke out. Soon stones were thrown and Francois ordered a charge resulting in the death of sixty Huguenots and approximately two hundred and fifty wounded.[27] This incident aroused the Huguenots throughout France to bear arms. The Catholics under the Triumvirate massed a successful counter-attack which gave the Huguenots a severe beating. However, the toll was costly for the Catholic side. To Catherine's advantage, the majority of the Triumvirate leaders were killed during the battles. Francois de Guise was assassinated; St. André was killed at the battle of Dreux,; and Antione de Navarre was mortally wounded at the seige of Rouen. Meanwhile Constable Montmorency was held prisoner by the Huguenots.[28] The Triumvirate, therefore, fell apart and Catherine was again in control. The most far reaching death was that of François de Guise, for his death had consequences on later events as the Guise family sought revenge. In February, 1563, Francois was assassinated by a Huguenot rebel. Soon afterward, the first religious war drew to a close with the Peace of Amboise, March 18, 1563.[29]

Peace ensued for four years, 1563-1567. During this time the Catholics banded together for a common defense forming the Catholic league. Formed in March, 1563, the league sought to bear arms, swore to march in defense of Catholic religion and preserve the Catholic faith, and incorporated the guilds into its systems.[30] Meanwhile the Huguenots were also gearing up

for another outbreak. Peace was only temporary, for it could not last with anger building within each party. By September, 1567, the Huguenots, growing anxious about the Duke of Alva's persecutions in the Netherlands, while animosity grew at home, attempted a coup d'état against the French Crown that failed. Still they managed to provoke massacres in several towns, dumping over a hundred Catholics down a well a Nimes.[31] This second religious war ended abruptly in March, 1568 with the Peace of Longjumeau. However, this psuedo-peace soon turned into the third religious war. Unsatisfied with the peace terms of Longjumeau, the Huguenots returned to fighting but suffered crushing defeats. By 1570 the Huguenots were willing to make peace, and in August the Peace of Saint Germain was established.[32]

While the domestic scene was in utter turmoil, the international scene was much more tranquil. Catherine de Medici's concerns about the religious wars were relieved by her hopes of arranging several international weddings. Marriages have always been sources of prestige, power, and money, a fact Catherine knew well. She worked diligently with the heads of state to settle marriage proposals. Each proposal carried with it a particular advantage or purpose which was useful for Catherine at the time. Catherine first attempted to marry Queen Elizabeth of England to Charles IX in April, 1563.[33] With Catherine relying closely on Admiral Coligny at this time, her plans for an English marriage were more in line with his interests. This marriage plan did in time become useful for

Catherine's own ends, for an English marriage would strengthen Catherine's hand when she met the Duke of Alva at Bayonne.[34] She knew that she needed a trump card when meeting with Philip II's envoy and an English marriage-alliance was a definite advantage. However, Charles IX was not considered a suitable husband, so Catherine quickly substituted her other son Henry of Anjou. Meanwhile, Catherine saw a benefit in luring the Prince of Condé away from his party by proposing marriage between Mary Queen of Scots and himself.[35] Catherine was also looking for a way to shore up her alliance with Scotland, for her attempts to ally with England were faltering. The Guise family quickly stepped in and asked that Charles IX wed Mary Queen of Scots, who happened to be their niece and their hope to gain ascendancy to the throne. The English marriage still remained as the vital issue, and mounting tension over fear of foreign invasion from Spain kept England from taking steps toward Catherine's proposal.

Despite the lag in these proposals, the English marriage was continually sought after. Queen Elizabeth showed interest, for the marriage would secure a needed defense alliance against Spain. She abandoned France only temporarily, feeling that France was too risky for an ally with it's many internal wars. Catherine de Medici was equally concerned about maintaining peace, and saw the English marriage as the pivotal point for European peace.[36] She labored strenously to reopen negotiations with England. Catherine's attempts revived the proposal, only to have the Prince of Anjou refuse to marry Elizabeth in

January, 1572.[37] Nearly shattered, Catherine quickly substituted her youngest son, the Duke of Alencon, for Anjou. Catherine continued to secure a match with Queen Elizabeth largely due to her concern over foreign affairs and the prodding of Admiral Coligny. Coligny was looking out for the needs of his people, and influenced Catherine with Huguenot benefits derived from diplomatic weddings. With the domestic problems still explosive and the Huguenots crying for protection, the offering of Henry of Navarre as suitor seemed quite natural, yet little interest was shown. The English marriage remained unresolved during the rest of 1572. Queen Elizabeth expressed minimal interest in the marriage but begged the question as long as it served the diplomatic function of keeping the Spaniards from invading England. Disappointed, Catherine turned toward home and sought peace through a domestic marriage. Hoping to bring about reconciliation, Catherine offered her daughter, Marguerite, to Henry of Navarre.[38] Despite the obstacle of a Papal dispensation, Catherine succeeded in this wedding arrangement. The Bourbon marriage was completed only to be marred by the eventful massacre six days later.

Simultaneously with Catherine de Medici's involvement with marriage arrangements, the Netherlands affair developed. The Spanish Netherlands was under a threat of revolt, led mainly by Huguenots in retaliation against Philip II's persecutions. This was a constant sore spot for Philip II and created tension throughout the rest of Europe. England pursued the

marriage proposals precisely because she had an interest in the Spanish Netherlands.[39] Catherine herself viewed the situation with caution and refrained from involvement. However, other Frenchmen planned to be involved, as French Huguenots wished to come to the aid of their religious brothers. Louis of Nassau and William of Orange, a German, planned an invasion of the Netherlands. Diplomacy was the key to their scheme, thus it had to await an English treaty, hopefully through the English marriage.[40] To their advantage Coligny favored their plans of involvement. Despite their harmonies, Catherine and Coligny were split on this issue. In fact, "their inability to cooperate way one of the disasters of this whole period."[41] Whereas Catherine feared war with Spain, which she sincerely believed would happen if France interfered, Coligny was the least concerned. From his viewpoint, a foreign war was more welcomed than a civil war.[42] A war against the Crown would certainly include support from Spain. So, he favored involvement even if it meant war with Spain: better to fight against Spain than to fight against Spain and the French Crown simultaneously. In an effort to support the Netherlands enterprise, Coligny pushed for an Anglo-Bourbon marriage between Elizabeth and Henry of Navarre.[43] Meanwhile, he attempted to frustrate the Bourbon-Valois marriage arrangement. Unfortunately, Coligny lost control of his extremists, which lead him to disaster.

Division also came between Catherine and Charles IX. Charles IX, who had befriended Coligny, was drawn toward

involvement in the Netherlands. Catherine, still holding to her fears of a Spanish war, desperately endeavoured to convince Charles otherwise. However, a wedge had been driven between them which resulted in weakening the Crown and in doing so weakened Catherine's power, whose sole authority rested upon the Crown.[44] Since the meeting at Bayonne was unsuccessful, Catherine knew that relations with Spain were strained. She knew also that relations with England were hardly secure. Philip II revealed his intentions when he wrote the Duke of Alva, "...the only means of securing the safety of the Netherlands was to overthrow the Crown of England."[45] His intentions seemed to indicate that he would stop at nothing to protect his holdings, and his recent victory at the Battle of Lepanto gave credance to his ability to do it. Under this threat, Catherine was forced into her third fatal mistake now associated with the extreme Catholics.[46]

With the Treaty of Blois in April, 1572, the enterprise went into full swing.[47] The treaty with England was complete and the invasion plans were set in motion. The capture of the Brille in April provided the right opportunity to invade, so French Huguenots poured in to the Spanish Netherlands. Despite French assistance, the revolt in the Netherlands was successfully squelched by Alva's troops, including an attempt to sieze him by military coup.[48] Alva's victories heightened tensions in France, while captured documents clearly implicating Charles served only to bring the troubled waters to boil.

Chapter Two

Just as the incidents prior to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre had much bearing on that event, so also did the personality of Catherine de Medici influence its outcome. Catherine's role as mother of kings and her personal goals shaped the framework in which the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was set. She constantly had her hand in matters of state. Her dealings with the crises reflected the paradoxical woman that she was. Her domineering presence cannot be discounted, nor can her import be avoided.

April 13, 1519 marked a joyous day for Lorenzo de Medici, Duke of Urbino, and his wife, Madeleine de la Tour d' Auvergne. On this day an heir was born in Florence into Lorenzo's branch of the de Medici family.[1] Her name was Catherine and her inheritance was an important one, for she inherited the de Medici name. The de Medici, a powerful banking family, claimed a large share in the control of Italy. Their world view was cast in the light of expansion as they strove to increase their power, wealth, and control of their holdings. They literally extended their horizons. From this family tradition, Catherine reaped a rich harvest, including a strong emphasis on managing business affairs and a strong sense of dynasty.[2] She too would have her sights on expansion,

amplifying her power of authority and her horizons.

Catherine's birth, however, brought only brief jubilation. She seemed to be the victim of misfortune. Soon after her birth, her mother died and five days later her father also died.[3] Orphaned at such an early age, Catherine became the prey of politics and war. As she grew older she experienced the horrors of civil war first hand. With Italy in the midst of a political revolt between the Florentines and the de Medicis, Catherine learned, especially with the loss of her Dutchy of Urbino, that civil wars were most unpleasant. To ensure her safety during this troublesome period, Catherine was quickly sent to the convent of Saintissima Annunziata delle Murate.[4] There her misfortune continued, as the nuns cared little for her well being. The tumult grew and Catherine's dignity was endangered by suggestions to place her in a brothel, to chain her naked to the walls of Florence, or to rape her. Fortune prevailed, however, and she was sent as a hostage to the cloister to the harsh world of the Sixteenth Century.

Catherine's life continued to be the source of much attention. Being the last branch of her family's line, her marriage caused much concern. As it turned out, Catherine became an instrument of matrimonial politics and she was well aware of the attention paid to her. Her marriage involved several political dealings in which strings were pulled by several people. Pope Clement VII, Catherine's uncle, and Francis I of France arranged her marriage to the French

dauphin, Henry II.[6] The marriage was planned so that both Francis I and Clement VII would profit from it. Playing politics against the Emperor Charles V, a Hapsburg, Catherine's marriage to the dauphin strengthened the hand of Francis I against Charles V.[7] The Papcy benefited from the availability of French support.

Catherine's reign as queen however, was troublesome. Her less than direct royal lineage caused most Frenchmen to reject her, thus forcing her to feel the pain of loneliness. Yet she was fully qualified to be queen, for she was the second cousin of Antione de Navarre who was himself a Prince of the blood. Through her mother, Catherine could also claim direct descendancy from St. Louis (1226-1270), the former king of France.[8] But her troubles were just beginning. Catherine suffered much for knowing that her beloved husband, Henry II, had abandoned her in favor of his mistress, Diane de Poitiers. She bore this rejection calmly and compassionately, but later wrote to her daughter Elizabeth

> You have seen me in former days as content as you are now, and believing that I should never have any trouble but that of not being loved by the King your father as I would have wished. He doubtless honored me more than I deserved. But I loved him so much that I always feared to offend him as you well know. Now God has taken him from me...so think of me and let me serve as a warning to you, not to trust overmuch in the love of your husband.[9]

Her grief was further compounded by the fact that she was barren for the first ten years of her marriage. A childless

queen was a disgrace. Despite Catherine's eventual ability to bear a child in 1543, she found no joy. Her children were soon placed in the care of Monsieur de Humières, cousin of Diane of Poitiers.[10] Even though her husband remained unfaithful and her children were taken away from her, Catherine carried on with great determination. Her scars, nevertheless, were easily seen, as the Ambassador of the Duke of Savoy observed, "A younger women by ten years, she gave me the impression of a person who has come out of a serious illness or escaped a great danger."[11] Still her troublesome reign plagued her, as when Diane of Poitiers was named regent while Henry II was absent battling the Italians and the Holy Roman Empire in 1552.[12] Catherine was denied power as the Queen of France, but she took it in stride. The pain, however, caught up with her. Deeply distressed, she could hold it no longer. The Venetian Ambassador, Giovanni Correr wrote:

> I know that she hath often been found weeping in her chamber; but she at once dried her eyes and dissembled her sadness; and in order to mislead those who estimated the state of affairs by the expression of her countenance, she wore a calm and joyous aspect when abroad.13

Although beset by many frustrations, Catherine endured the hardships. Her reliance on de Medicean caution pulled her through and she was content to bide her time.

Catherine de Medici was a Sixteen Century woman. She was a woman of much paradox. Her interests were in the security of her children so that they could advance in the world. She

wanted all her children to enjoy the benefits of royalty. Her means of achieving these goals were certainly legitimate by Sixteenth-Century standards. Severe punishments were recognized as necessary means to an end. In fact the poisoning of enemies was not at all uncommon.[14] Like her counterparts, Queen Elizabeth of England, and Jeanne d' Albret, wife of Antione de Navarre, Catherine showed herself to be more masculine than feminine.[15] She appeared to be fearless, learned, capable of ruling, full of common sense, and exposed to bloody sights. Paradoxically her life was both Christian and superstious; she was deeply religious yet she consulted astrologers. Despite all of this Catherine lacked moral principles. "'Catherine's educational influences left her active and acute intellect wholly uniformed of any moral ideas whatever. Right and wrong were practically words devoid of sense for her.'"[16] Catherine, therefore, fitted into the mainstream of Sixteenth-Century principal political figures. She was not an outsider; she was part and parcel of that age.

Catherine possessed some unusual qualities. She was her own woman. Although influenced by the customs and thoughts of her own period, she remained a unique individual. Catherine possessed a strong love for learning which was tempered by a fondness for sports. She had an artistic taste, but it too was qualified by her "power to sway those around her."[17] Catherine benefited greatly from a keen awareness of political circumstances. Her perceptions kept her watchful and waiting. Along with her understanding of human nature, Catherine

detested extreme violence, a trait she shared with her great grandfather, Lorenzo the Magnificent.[18] In doing so, Catherine revealed her great patience and strong power of self-control. These made her will ironclad, however, and once it was set in motion she could not be deterred.[19]

Catherine was above all a mother with strong maternal instincts. Her children came first in life and her desires and goals were to advance theirs. Her life centered around the control of political power from which she could see to her children's needs and the placement of her children on the thrones of Europe.[20] She, therefore, strove endlessly to arrange marriages with the royal houses of Europe. Peace was sought nearly at all costs, for it was periods of tranquillity that afforded the most security for her beloved children. Catherine attempted to heal the wounds of France in order to safeguard her maternal concerns. Unfortunately, Catherine was not farsighted; she saw only the immediate situation yet she was a devoted mother who was determined to rule through her sons.[21]

Being a Renaissance woman, Catherine de Medici was greatly influenced by Machiavellian thought.[22] Her constant struggle to maintain control of the government revealed her to be a true disciple of Niccolò Machiavelli. She believed in his principles found in <u>The Prince</u>, "'A Prince's job is to keep his realm and every possible means he uses to do it will always be deemed honest and he will be praised by everybody.'"[23] Catherine worked hard to preserve her French kingdom often

siding with a political enemy if the circumstances proved to be worth the risk. She would adapt herself to the situation. Although she avoided harsh treatment, Catherine found strength in Machiavelli when cruelty became a necessity. "'It (cruelty) can be said to be well employed when it is used on occasion only, dictated by the necessity of retaining power, and on condition that one has no further recourse to it except in the interest of the nation.'"[24] Machiavellianism ultimately failed Catherine, however, for she was a woman and mother first and a politician second.

For most of her life Catherine de Medici lived in tumult. Her childhood days witnessed the strife of revolt. As a young Queen she experienced the pains of abandonment and unrequited love. While her later years, 1559-1589 were spent in an exhaustive struggle to retain the power she had achieved. Monsieur Imbert de Saint-Amand spoke of that burdensome attempt: "' Never had a more overwhelming burden rested on a woman's shoulders. A Blanche of Castile's force of soul would not have been great enough to struggle against the tempests about to be let loose on France.'"[25] Yet, Catherine remained undaunted. She never refused to give in. At the end of the third religious war in March, 1563, she wrote: "'If I am not to be again hampered, I mean to show that women are more sincerely determined to preserve this kingdom than the men who have plunged it into its present miserable condition.'"[26] Catherine did what she felt must be done. She would not turn back, always pursuing the goals she set out to accomplish.

Catherine was a woman desirous of power.

Chapter Three

In the summer of 1572, the influences of Catherine's troublesome life manifested themselves. Her turbulent youth and her frustrated reign as Queen had caught up with her. Something had to give and it was during this summer Catherine's attempts to instill peace collapsed. Her contradictory policies were no longer able to appease her opponents. In line with her paradoxical nature, Catherine's movements toward peace resulted in strife. The summer of 1572 brought all these tensions to a climax. The massacre on the feast of St. Bartholomew August 24, 1572 was the release of those tensions.

Prior to the summer of 1572, Catherine de Medici had tolerated the Huguenots and responded to their cries for religious expression. Her dealings with them were lenient and her policies favored their demands. Catherine felt that this was the way to peace, so she followed her designs despite the disapproval of Philip II and Pope Gregory XIII. Pressure was constantly applied in a hope that Catherine would again side with the extreme Catholics to drive out the heretical Huguenots. However, Catherine still persued her moderate course. Catherine expressed her views in a letter to Philip II, written in 1560.

We have during twenty or thirty years

> tried coutery with the idea of cutting out the contagion of this evil from among us and we have seen by experience that violence has not served except to increase and multiply it...It has been said by many people of good judgement that the worst means of suppressing these new opinions is the public death of those who hold them because it was to be seen that they were strengthened by such spectacles ....This evil is so deeply rooted that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to drive it out except by the remedy of a general council.1

The summer of 1572 marked a change in Catherine's temperament. Catherine was about to have a change of heart. Her leniency shifted to stringency. Catherine felt that she had been betrayed and planned to avenge her betrayer.

During his reign Charles IX had worked closely with Admiral Coligny. Although a Huguenot, Coligny was able to strike up a strong relationship with Charles IX. Catherine was aware of this relationship, but was unafraid of it for she knew that she must have control over her son, Charles IX. In fact, she had invited Admiral Coligny to Court hoping that his presence would instill peace among the Huguenots. By August 1572, however, that relationship had out grown the reaches of Catherine's control.[2] Referring to the Admiral as "father", Charles IX was continuely asking for the Admiral's advice. Charles became extremely dependent on Coligny for counsel regarding the invasion of the Netherlands. Coligny had convinced Charles IX that France should become involved in the Netherlands and the King simply relied upon the Admiral's recommendations. By August 13, 1572; three thousand

Huguenots had prepared to relieve the siege at Mons.[3] Charles IX and Coligny were preparing to assist the religious revolt in the Spanish Netherlands. Charles's relationship with Admiral Coligny had placed him in direct opposition to Philip II. Charles IX had abandoned his mother's tutelage and sought guidance from his trusted friend.

Catherine de Medici was appalled by her son's behavior. To her, Charles IX's actions threw aside all that she had worked for. He seemed to be carelessly casting aside the peace which she had painstakingly attempted to ensure. To invade the Spanish Netherlands, in Catherine's mind was sure to bring about war with Spain.[4] Philip II had already spoken vehemently of his disapproval of Catherine's policies of toleration, but to invade a trouble spot in his domain was sheer suicide. At Bayonne in 1565, the Duke of Alva voiced Philip II's distress, telling Catherine to eliminate the Huguenot leaders, rescend the edicts of toleration, banish all sedious preachers and institute stronger penalties for harboring heretics.[5] By 1572, Catherine realized that the balance between peace was held by a thin thread. To interfere with Spain's interests was certainly an invitation to foreign war. Catherine wanted no part in a war with Spain. Her designs for peace were being thwarted by Admiral Coligny's manipulations of Charles IX. Coligny was no longer an instrument of Catherine's plans, but a deterrent to her designs. Admiral Coligny was threatening her power base, since she derived her authority from her son. With Charles IX abandonment of his

mother for the Admiral, Catherine was unable to secure her aims for peace. Realizing that her power base was waning and that Admiral Coligny's presence would result in war, she concluded that the Admiral's life must be terminated.[6] Catherine was not about to let the Admiral stand in her way. She felt trapped and sought a way out. When forced with the prospects of the war with Spain because of French intervention, Catherine sought to rid herself of the menace posing the threat. Catherine's solution was the elimination of Admiral Coligny.

The plot to kill the Admiral was carefully planned. Catherine knew she could not be implicated in such a plot, fearing a reprisal from Charles IX. Besides, a good disciple of Machiavelli remained far removed from the actual action. To Catherine's advantage, the long feud between the Guise family and de Châtillions became essential to the plot. Ever since the assassination of Francois de Guise, in 1560, the Guise household wished to have revenge. Until now, Catherine had intervened in the name of peace. In that same name, Coligny became expediant. Lord Maurevert, who was known to be close to the Guise family, was chosen to assassinate Coligny.[7]

The festivities of Marquerite's wedding were to be a cover in the hope that the feud would erupt practically unnoticed. Catherine was not afraid of her own decision for she realized that this plot was perfectly legitmate. It was for the public welfare. Coligny was viewed as a criminal of the state so by Sixteenth-Century standards his death was

necessary.[8] The cover was to avoid mass rioting by the Huguenots who might misunderstand her intentions. On the morning of August 22, 1572, Lord Maurevert waited in a house connected with the Guise family for Admiral Coligny to pass by.[9] Late that morning two shots rang out and Coligny collapsed. However, the Admiral was not dead, for the shots had hit his hand and forearm.[10] The plot had failed and Admiral Coligny lived.

Meanwhile Charles IX was greatly disturbed about the attempt on his dear friend's life. Such action was not to be dismissed lightly. Upon hearing the distressing news he vowed, "' I swear and promise to inflict such condign punishment on the culprits, their accomplices, aids and abetters, that the Admiral and his friend will be satisfied.'"[11] Coligny trusted his friend, the King. He knew that Charles IX would uphold justice and those responsible would be held accountable to the King. The Admiral cautioned his friends to be patient and not to act out of haste. He wished to wait and see what the King would do for him. Admiral Coligny did not seek revenge, for he was satisfied with Charles IX's manner of handling the injustice committed. Charles IX sent out messages, that he was resolved to have justice rendered at once.[12] The Admiral and his friends still felt that another attempt could be made and asked the King for protection. The Prince of Anjou, Charles IX's brother, quickly offered Jean de Monlezun Cosseins, and the King accepted his suggestion.[13] Colonel Cosseins was an important figure to the Prince of

of Anjou and Catherine. His loyalty to the Guise faction made his watchful eye over the Admiral quite beneficial if the King should reveal Catherine's and the Prince's involvement in the assassination attempt. Although Coligny distrusted Cosseins, he accepted the protection which Cosseins afforded and retained his trust in the King.

Catherine began to feel the pressure of concealment. The evidence being amassed pointed more and more to her involvement along with the Prince of Anjou's. The description of the assassign identified him as Maurevert, while the musket used confirmed the identification.[14] Catherine realized that it was only a matter of time until the evidence could be directly traced back to her. She knew that she was about to be trapped. Catherine knew of Charles IX's dislike for his brother. His suspicions once confirmed would surely result in Anjou's execution. Then would he not banish his mother from France forever? Catherine was determined to prevent either of these possibilities from ever taking place. Catherine was to be the fox who knew the snares and the lion who frightened the wolves.[15] She resorted to her instinct of self-preservation. Charles IX was close to the truth and threatened to assert his authority. He told his mother Catherine:

> What the Admiral told me is true. In France, Kings are only recognized by the power they wield. Now this power has drifted entirely into your hands, and the authority you display in my stead may some day be very detrimental to me and my kingdom. He told me to hold it in suspicion and to be on my guard against it....[16]

Charles IX was threatening Catherine's power base. She had to reassert her authority over the King or be swallowed by his ascendency to power. Catherine knew that this must be done to ensure her safety as well as Anjou's. This became especially true when demands for revenge reached the King on the night of August, 23. Armand de Clermont and Seigneur de Piles spoke boldly before the Court that justice must be meted out within twenty-four hours or the Huguenots would see to it themselves.[17] That same night Charles IX also learned of the truth; his mother and brother were both involved. This was the time for Catherine to act and act fast. Her maternal and survival instincts went into full swing. Catherine must trap Charles IX or be trapped herself. Catherine called together her intimate councilors. Her trusted friends and advisors; the Duke of Nevers, Conte de Retz, Rene de Birgues, the Keeper of the Seals, and Marshal Tavanner were all in attendance.[18] She met with them in the royal garden to devise a plan which would prevent the King from retailiating against Anjou and herself. Their plan was to convince Charles IX that Coligny and Huguenot leaders must be purged. With them gone, Catherine would remain in control. The King's sanction was necessary to legalize Catherine's desires and prevented the State Council from intervening.[19] In order to obtain Charles IX's consent, Catherine threatened the King with a contrived Huguenot plot. Although the evidence was unclear whether any Huguenot revolt was actually planned, Catherine used a trumped up version to scare Charles IX. She warned Charles IX that if he did not

act soon his power would vanish and he would become a King in name only.[20] Working in Catherine's favor was Charles IX's extreme jealousy of his brother, Anjou. Charles longed to be a great King yet he was dissatisfied with his present reign. Anjou had won many laurels as a soldier during the third religious war. Anjou more than Charles appeared to be following his father's footsteps.[21] In forewarning Charles IX about the Huguenot rebellion, Catherine cleverly sparked Charles IX's jealousy. First, she insulted her son's ability to rule. Once the Huguenots revolted, Charles IX, as she warned would be caught in a power struggle between the Guises and the Huguenots. She drew the picture clearly: Charles IX's authority as King would be emasculated. Then she added salt to the wound by announcing that she and Anjou were leaving France if Charles IX refused to act and allow his authority to weaken.[22] Charles IX's jealousy was enraged. Anjou had always been close to his mother and Charles despised their intimacy. His hatred for his brother and his desire to avenge his mother's exclusive love for Anjou, had driven him toward Coligny and the involvement in the Netherlands.[23] Now that same hatred entrapped him. He had to give in to Catherine's demands or fear loss of face. No longer the hunter, he was the hunted. Under the pressures he screamed with fury, "'God's death! Kill them all! Kill them all, so that none may come back to blame me! Give the order quickly!'"[24]

Catherine had her legal sanction. Her desires to rid herself of the Huguenot leaders had the consent of the King.

However, Catherine received more than she had asked for. The King's orders included all the Huguenots, and not just the leaders. Catherine never intended to kill all of the Huguenots, so she again met with her trusted advisors to plan who would be saved from the execution. Preparations were made for maintaining order. Claude Marcel, the former provost, and Le Charron, the present provost, were responsible for the maintenance of public order.[25] However, Marcel intended to use Le Charron's guards as actual executors of the Huguenots. The attempts made to ensure containment simply broke down and the massacre mushroomed. Ironically, Catherine always strove for peace. Her original plot against the Admiral and her second designs for a purge were based on the retention of peace. All her designs were for naught, however, for tranquil-ity ended in a bitter fight for survival.

The King's order was scheduled to begin at the ringing of the bells for matins on the feast of St. Bartholomew. Catherine greatly feared the chaos that would ensue. In an effort to keep control of the situation she ordered that the tocsin in Saint Germain l'Auxerror's be rung ninety minutes sooner. At four o'clock Sunday morning, the bells of Paris resounded and began the so called "Parisian matin."[26] With the commencement of the bells, the mass murder of hundreds of Huguenots began. Meanwhile, Henri de Guise was in search of his revenge for his father's death. Before the bells pealed, Henri de Guise and his armed cohorts rode to the home of Admiral Coligny. With the head of the guards, Cosseins, being

in the Guise employment, Henri and his men had no problem breaking into Coligny's house. Coligny's faith still rested with the King and he assumed no harm would come to him, for he supposed that he was still under the King's protection.[27] Henri de Guise had other plans, however; and his men brutally attacked the Admiral. After being stabbed several times, the Admiral was tossed out the window and crashed in the street below for Monsieur de Guise's inspection. To insure that Coligny was in fact dead, he was beheaded. His head was then dragged through the streets of Paris and hung from the common town gallows.[28] With Admiral Coligny's death there was no turning back. The bells had been rung and the massacre was underway. Citizens throughout Paris joined the crusade to exterminate the Huguenots. Grabbing knives, axes, swords, or any lethal instrument they could locate, the Parisians began their brutal slaughter. Although the reports conflict, some five to eight thousand Huguenots died in Paris alone.[29] Ironically, as the news of the Admiral's death reached the Huguenots on the other bank, they banded together not to flee for their lives but to come to the King's protection. Unaware of the King's orders, they rode on to save the King. Seeing the King's men at Toure de Nesles now down their fellows, they realized their fate and the King's treacherous deeds.[30]

Not all the Huguenots were being slaughtered. Back at Court, Henry de Navarre and his newly wedded wife Marguerite wondered what was in store for young Henry. Despite his merciless rage the evening before, Charles IX was willing to be

mericul to his brother-in-law, and Louis, Prince of Condé. After explaining to them that the Admiral was killed to prevent any trouble from arising, Charles IX offered them their lives if they would accept the Catholic creed, and swear to the Crown.[31] Henry de Navarre hesitated but answered he would attempt to please the King. Louis, Prince of Condé, spoke of his faithfulness to his religion, yet promised his loyalty to his King. Charles IX spared them both.

Catholics ran through the streets attacking their Protestant countrymen. Neither women nor children were spared. Friends, neighbors, or anyone who was a known Huguenot met a cruel death. Spain's ambassador, Don Diego de Cuniga, joyfully reported to Philip II:

> As I write, they are killing them all; they are stripping them naked, dragging them through the streets, plundering houses, and sparing not even the children. May God be blessed who has converted the French Princes to His cause.32

Spain greatly approved of these actions. Philip II had long awaited Charles IX's annihilation of the Protestant heretics. Even Rome sent her praises. As the letters poured into Rome confirming the reports of the Protestant extermination, Pope Gregory XIII said: "'...Charles, King of France, bears the name of Most Christian not only as an old title belonging to him, but as a right that he has lately earned and deserved by his destruction of heretics, the enemies of Christ.'"[33]

Conclusion

The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was the culmination of the political-religious struggle in France between 1560 and 1572. While, "the failure to kill the Admiral Coligny was the immediate occasion of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day," the events during that twelve year period largely shaped the massacre's outcome. The three civil wars paved the way for further blood shed. Reflected in those wars was the intense and bitter rivalry between the Guise, Bourbon, and de Châtillon families which spearheaded the massacre. The reign of two weak Kings provided Catherine de Medici, their mother, with the opportunity to rise to power. It was at this time that she became the central figure in shaping the eventual massacre. Though her attempts were aimed at keeping peace, Catherine paradoxically created hostility. Her interests centered around her family and how she could provide for her children. In pursuing those interests, Catherine stirred up much conflict and division in France and abroad. In the name of those interests she became entrapped. From her point of view, her only escape was the death of Admiral Coligny. His life became expedient for a higher cause, the preservation of the Valois line, which included the maintenance of peace. Since the Admiral threatened that peace, thus posing a threat

on the Valois name he was ordered to be killed. Coligny, through a bit of luck, survived the assassination attempt, thus throwing Catherine in a frenzy. Through her cunning she obtained royal permission to kill off the Huguenot leaders, but received more than she had asked. A political purge turned into a religious blood bath. Enthusiastic Catholics took advantage of the King's order and killed any Huguenot within sight.

The development of the historical events which lead to the massacre is filled with much irony. Henry II's death was a chance of fate, but from that point the massacre had its earliest beginnings. The instigator of the First Civil War, Francois de Guise, was assassinated at the end of that war, and this began the desire to avenge his death. Catherine de Medici attempted to provide peace throughout France, yet managed only to instill animosty. Catherine's decision to kill Coligny, in order to solve her problems, backfired and thus causing more trouble that had to be dealt with. Finally, Catherine's bid to insure peace by slaughtering the Huguenot leaders resulted in the total collapse of peace as France erupted and her citizens brutally killed fellow citizens. So sprang the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.

Footnotes

Chapter One

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[13] John, Ernest Neale, The Age of Catherine. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), p. 59.

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22) Neale, p. 61.

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33) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 133.

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35) Thompson, p. 243.

36) Thompson, p. 160.

37) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 217.

38) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 150.

39) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 217.

40) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 170.

41) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 178.

42) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 200.

43) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 180.

44) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 233.

45) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 196.

46) Sutherland, The Massacre, p. 233.

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20) Norguèse, p. 26.

21) Heritier, p. 301.

22) Norguèse, p. 26.

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Conclusion

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