Worship at the Margins: On Violence, Enclosures, and the Reformed Church of Paris (1555–1562)

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On the evening of 4 September 1557, when a secret Protestant gathering was discovered in a home opposite the Collège du Plessis on Paris' Left Bank, around a hundred attendees were arrested and taken in chains down the grand Rue Saint-Jacques to the Châtelet prison. The Reformed pastor Antoine de la Roche Chandieu recounts that the group was greeted by an 'infinite multitude of people spread along the street'; Catholic Parisians pelted their victims with street muck and tore at their hair as they trudged.[1] It was thus only when they had arrived at prison that these unfortunate men and women were able to find some respite from the tribulations of public life. Placed all together in the Châtelet's most insalubrious dungeon, they were able to calm their nerves with the collective singing of psalms — much to the astonishment of passers-by outside.[2] In a certain light, then, their night seems to have ended as it started. The community was gathered once again in a confined, yet sanctified space. In the end, though most were later released, seven of the group were burnt at the stake for heresy.

The story of the Reformed Church of Paris is neither a successful nor a hugely long one. Established in 1555 in the home of Jean de la Ferrière (Fig. 1), the Church weathered five hard years of secrecy before a change of tack in royal policy saw the introduction of a more tolerant climate in the capital.[3] Such a climate, however, was short-lived: the semblance of religious pluralism fostered by the 1562 January Edict, which permitted Protestant worship in Paris' faubourgs, was only to last several months. In May that year, just as civil war broke out in the kingdom, Charles IX pronounced the city as Catholic and Catholic alone, and the Church went underground. A decade

1 Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, *Histoire des persécutions et martyrs de l'Église de Paris: depuis l'an 1557, jusques au temps du Roy Charles Neuvième* (Unknown, 1563), p. 10. Hereafter HPM. All translations are my own.

2 Ibid., p. 11.

3 Jean-Pierre Babelon, *Paris au XVIe siècle. 'Nouvelle histoire de Paris'* (Association pour la publication d'une histoire de Paris, 1986), p. 414; Stuart Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: The Guise Family and the Making of Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 119.

later, the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre wiped out the vast majority of the Protestants who resided in Paris at that time, as well as thousands of others across France.

Ultimately, the capital's Protestant community cannot be said strictly to have enjoyed a 'disenclosure of the world'.[4] Its constituents' spatial experience was tied up with borders, boundaries, and their inability to transcend them. Nevertheless, contemporary developments in Urban Studies may signify new possibilities for interpreting the complexities of the past. Taking inspiration from Oren Yiftachel's writing on 'gray space',[5] this essay seeks to uncover the possibilities of life at the edge in sixteenth-century Paris. 'Enclosures' in this context are understood primarily as the limited sites in which expressions of Reformed faith, banished from the public realm, were possible. They appear both literally and figuratively in the written accounts pertaining to the years of 1555 to 1562: as prison cells, private homes and temples, but also as open sites beyond the respectability of the city walls. This essay will first present important context to the French Reformation and Paris' Catholic hostilities, followed by a discussion of the Protestants' corresponding spatial practices and identities. It will deploy gray space as an analytical framework, demonstrating the ways in which even the most stifling of enclosures could be reimagined as spaces of communal agency.

4 I follow Achille Mbembe's definition as discussed in 'Disenclosure', in *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 42–89.

5 Oren Yiftachel, 'Critical Theory and "Gray Space": Mobilization of the Colonized', *City*, 13.2–3 (2009), p. 250, doi:10.1080/13604810902982227.



Fig. 1. A detail from Truschet and Hoyau's *Plan de Bâle*, showing the neighbourhood of Jean de la Ferrière. Reproduced from Basel University Library, via Wikimedia Commons <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Paris_by_Truschet_and_Hoyau_-_Basel_University_Library.jpg> [accessed 8 December 2024].

In the early sixteenth century, several decades prior to the establishment of Paris' Reformed community, criticisms first levied by the German theologian Martin Luther (1483–1546) against the malpractices of the Roman Church sparked the beginnings of tumultuous religious schism in Europe. Far exceeding their author, Luther's ideas triggered reformations across the continent of differing colours, finding their way to France principally through the writings of Geneva-based Jean Calvin (1509–1564). Put very briefly, Calvinists — French Protestants, later 'Huguenots' — regarded the Bible as the sole authoritative text of the Christian faith, to be studied in the vernacular by men and women irrespective of their education. They criticised all rituals and customs not detailed within the Bible as apocryphal, moreover. Purgatory and the intercession of saints were both denounced as inventions of the papacy, while the Lord's Supper was deemed a spiritual, not transubstantial process; contrary to Catholic tradition, Christ was not believed to be made *physically* present in the Blessed Sacrament through the performance of Mass.[6] The extent of this interpretation was that all notions of an innate material sanctity on Earth were summarily rejected. Churches possessed no more holiness in and of themselves than latrines, as the various waves of Protestant iconoclasm in the early 1560s sought to demonstrate. Calvin informed his followers that sacred space was only to be found within themselves and the act of communal worship. For this reason, temples tended to be designed with a central emphasis on the pulpit, signifying the importance placed on the Word, and decorated austerely, with no worldly distractions (Fig. 2). The absence of a purpose-built structure would cause only minor difficulties, though, since any site could in theory be made sacred

6 Cf. French Reformed Churches, 'The French Confession of Faith A.D. 1559', in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (The Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 137–59.

through the gathering of the flock.[7]

Some sites were likely easier to repurpose than others all the same. Sixteenth-century Paris was one of Europe's largest, most densely populated cities, and one of its most Catholic at that. The vast majority of Paris' residents lived in narrow gabled townhouses, several stories high, which lined the city's streets and its bridges over the Seine. Multiple families often shared these buildings, of which the walls, doors, and floors were thin and flimsily built. Arlette Jouanna writes that '[i]n an overpopulated city, with its cramped and poorly insulated dwellings, everyone knew about the activities of their district's inhabitants'.[8] Conflicts frequently arose over the uses and occupation of land in Parisian neighbourhoods, as residents sought to preserve the thin boundaries encircling what they believed to be their own. Secrecy was thus as scarce as space itself.[9] The Parisians themselves were furthermore pious to the point of zealotry. The cartographer François de Belleforest claims in 1575 that

> Paris possesses a people so moved by holy things, so acquainted with devotion, and so reverent towards its priests, that [he] regard[s] the Parisians' godliness to be as significant as the great number of churches in the holy territory of Rome.[10]

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7 Randal Carter Working, *The Visual Theology of the Huguenots: Towards an Architectural Iconology of Early Modern French Prvotestantism, 1535 to 1623* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), pp. 63–103.

8 Arlette Jouanna, T*he Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: The Mysteries of a Crime of State* (24 August 1572) (Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 126.

9 Yvonne-Hélène Le Maresquier-Kesteloot, 'Le voisinage dans l'espace parisien à la fin du Moyen Âge: bilan d'une enquête', *Revue historique*, 122.1 (1998), p. 60.

10 François de Belleforest, *L'ancienne et grande cité de Paris* (A. Quantin, 1882), p. 32.

Spectacular processions would file through the capital's narrow, shrine-studded thoroughfares on a daily basis, bearing relics for the public adoration of onlookers. Church bells dominated the city's soundscape, the staging of Passion plays its open spaces, and radical preachers its public discourse.[11]

The extent to which the capital's public sphere was actively *policed* is perhaps unsurprising in this light.[12] Religious non-conformists were punished by municipal authorities and vigilante groups alike with the utmost severity. On the Place de Grève and the Place Maubert, 'heretics' such as Anne du Bourg, a prominent magistrate, were burned alive in front of large, gawping crowds (Fig. 3).[13] Rather less officially, Parisian children are said in 1559 to have erected Marian statues on street corners as a means of singling out the passers-by who failed to genuflect before them or bare their head out of respect. Those unfortunate enough to be caught found themselves 'suddenly attacked by certain men lying in wait in nearby houses.'[14] Similarly, the moderate Catholic Pierre de Paschal recounts how in 1562 crowds disinterred a corpse that had been buried according to Reformed rites in the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents, throwing it 'into the great road, right in the middle of the muck'.[15] The performance of Catholic identity, whether peaceful or aggressive, was constant and near-ubiquitous; in an urban environment defined by the orthodoxy of its rhythms, making space for Protestantism — portable though it was — was inevitably an uphill battle.

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11 Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 9–49.

12 Diane Roussel, 'L'espace public comme enjeu des guerres de Religion et de la paix civile. Réflexions sur la notion d'espace public et ses métamorphoses à Paris au XVIe siècle', in *L'espace public au Moyen Âge, Le Noeud Gordien* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), pp. 131–46.

13 Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 52.

14 Louis Régnier de la Planche, 'Histoire de l'estat de France tant de la république que de la religion sous le règne de François II', in *Choix de chroniques et mémoires sur l'histoire de France* (no publisher, 1836), p. 237.

15 Pierre de Paschal, *Journal de ce qui s'est passé en France durant l'année 1562, principalement dans Paris et la Cour* (Société de l'Histoire de Paris, 1950), p. 7; 13. Hereafter JPF.



Fig. 2. *Le Temple du Paradis*, oil painting by Jean Perrissin, 1573. Currently held at the International Museum of the Reformation, Geneva. Reproduced from the International Museum of the Reformation <https://www.musee-reforme.ch/en/temple-of-heaven/> [accessed 8 December 2024].



Fig. 3. 1559 Execution of Anne du Bourg, from the *Recueil de combats, massacres, sièges, entrées de villes et plusieurs autres actions arrivées sous les règnes des rois Henry II, Charles IX et Henry III, tant en France que dans les Pays-Bas* (1635), engraving by Frans Hogenberg. Reproduced from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica Digital Library <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84467681/f7.item> [accessed 8 December 2024].

But who exactly made up the Parisian Protestant community, and how did these people navigate the city's hostilities? As this section suggests, the Reformed image seems largely to have been intertwined with the various enclosures in which the practice of heterodox identities was possible. Contrary to many of today's persecuted urban communities, records of arrests on religious grounds in Paris' criminal archives indicate that the new faith was somewhat more prevalent among wealthier, educated individuals, particularly those in literate professions. What is more, they show that these individuals were far from a community apart. If slightly concentrated in the Quartier Saint-Séverin and the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the Protestants appear to have been situated fairly evenly in homes throughout the city, in amongst their Catholic neighbours.[16] For those seeking communal worship, however, going off the proverbial beaten path was clearly a necessity, and secrecy was key. In a letter to Calvin, pastor Jean Macard writes that he was travelling between five houses per day to perform services for small groups, thereby avoiding the risks posed by a large congregation.[17] Many of these services were held at night, using the obscurity of unlit streets for cover, with locations changed regularly. Preference was given to spots in the grassy, less built-up *faubourgs* on the other side of the city walls, such as in homes leading out onto the Pré-aux-Clercs meadows. Worshipers were granted the reassurance that, should their gatherings be discovered, the neighbouring fields would provide them with a quick means of escape.

For, in these marginal sites, trouble was often close at hand. The *faubourgs* bore disreputable connotations; the Protestants may well have encountered sex workers, drifters, and duelling

16 Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 110–112.

17 Jean Macard, 'Letter of 7 February 1558', in *Précis de l'histoire de l'Église Réformée de Paris* ([no publisher], 1862), I, xxv–xxvi.

students as they skulked about in the shadows.[18] In an edict of 1543, François I promoted the urban development of the capital by emphasising his desire to accommodate his subjects within its ramparts, thereby sparing them from 'the wicked young men and the indecent people' that lay beyond them.[19] Nevertheless, it is evident that Parisian Protestant identity was in some ways bound up with these edges — at once topographically open and socially 'enclosed' — of the city. This was increasingly the case in the brief, more clement period from 1560 to 1562, during which Reformed temples in the *faubourgs* grew popular. Privileging the formative role of material conditions over theological doctrine, Jérémie Foa has described French Protestants as having arrived at their sense of self quite literally 'step by step'. To be a Huguenot meant performing one's exclusion for all to see: after the 1563 Edict of Amboise granted the community a number of distant extramural worship sites, Reformed townspeople began banding together to undertake the long, perilous journeys out through the city gates that were required to reach them, often singing loudly as they marched.[20] And though no such sites were permitted in the vicinity of the capital, the earlier toleration of worship in Paris' *faubourgs* for a few months of 1562 seems to have triggered shorter excursions of comparable effect. Paschal emphasises the great theatricality that seized the city at this time, describing how, on one occasion, Protestants had gathered close to the Hôtel des Tournelles, up against the Porte Saint-Antoine, as the Queen Mother was nearby: 'There was a great number of them, greater than normal. Some came out of curiosity to see the assembly; others came so that the

18 Diane Roussel, 'Limites vécues et pratiques sociales des marges de Paris au XVIe siècle', in *Les limites de Paris (XIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2017), pp. 131–48.

19 François I, 'Ordonnance du 3 Septembre 1543', in *Histoire de la ville de Paris, by Michel Félibien* (Chez G. Desprez et J. Desessartz, 1725), v, p. 768.

20 Jérémie Foa, 'Devenir Huguenot pas à pas. La contribution de l'espace urbain à l'incorporation des identités confessionnelles au temps des Guerres de Religion', in *La religion vécue: les laïcs dans l'Europe moderne* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013), pp. 45–65.

Queen would know how large a group they had become.'[21]

Conversely, Catholic frustrations with the Protestants' interior activities demonstrate the conceptual significance of enclosures on the other end of the confessional divide. Following the aforementioned 1557 affair of the Rue Saint-Jacques, rumours quickly circulated among the populace of the indecencies that had been committed both at the townhouse gathering and later on in the cells of the Châtelet. The Catholic priest and memoirist Claude Haton describes how, in the first instance, after they had finished their rites, 'it was permitted to the men to approach the women and the women the men, each of them led by their desire.'[22] Confined Protestant spaces were thus scandalised as sites of orgiastic pleasure in the Parisian popular imagination through the cover that the surrounding walls afforded them. What exactly, asked Catholic propagandists, are our wicked Huguenot neighbours plotting in the privacy of their own homes? Chandieu's account of the martyrdom of Jean Beffroy speaks similarly to this spatial definition of social otherness. Beffroy, an ironmonger on the Rue de la Mortellerie (Fig. 4), is said first to have stoked the ire of his neighbours by refusing to decorate his house's façade in preparation for a procession — an occasion on which those Catholics 'carry their God through the streets', Chandieu writes — and later by working noisily with hammers on a feast day. Owing to their austerity or their porosity, the edges of his abode marked Beffroy out as a Protestant — he was later burnt for his crimes.[23] As such, if the Protestants viewed the stigmatised *faubourgs* as the circumscribed areas in which godly behaviour was possible, their Catholic detractors, pointing accusatorily to secret, insulated spaces, seem to have furthered the community's associations with the enclosed. How, then, could the Protestants look beyond these boundaries?

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21 JPF, p. 4.

22 Claude Haton, *Mémoires contenant le récit des événements accomplis de 1553 à 1582*, ed. by Félix Bourquelot, 2 vols (Imprimerie Impériale, 1857), I, p. 48.

23 HPM, pp. 352–352.



Fig. 4. A detail from Truschet and Hoyau's *Plan de Bâle*, showing Rue de la Mortellerie. Reproduced from Basel University Library, via Wikimedia Commons <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Paris_by_Truschet_and_Hoyau_-_Basel_University_Library.jpg> [accessed 8 December 2024].

Stepping back now, we might return to the theoretical framework introduced in this essay's opening lines. It has been shown thus far that sixteenth-century Paris was constructed as a bastion of all-encompassing Catholicism through an array of ritual and social mechanisms. Aggressive displays of faith kept the streets clean and any manifestations of Protestantism out, for the most part at least (Fig. 5). Responding to these conditions, members of the Reformed community developed strategies of navigating the city's many edges. Praying in whispers, clinging to the shadows, and fleeing the bustle of life within Paris' walls were all part and parcel of practising a minority religion. As will be discussed, however, these men and women do seem to have experienced some glimmers of hope in spite of their predicament. Drawing on Oren Yiftachel's work on gray space and Bedouin Arab groups, I contend that such glimmers were often tied up with the spatial experience of marginalisation itself. Some elaboration of Yiftachel's approach is thus in order.

Let it first be noted that while period differences foreclose exact comparisons between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries, themes of violence, agency, and urban space are common both to this discussion of the Reformed Church and Yiftachel's own. At the heart of the theorist's work lies Henri Lefebvre's celebrated enquiry: who, it is asked, has a right to the city when the forces of capital are given centre stage?[24] Significantly, though, Lefebvre's work is taken up by Yiftachel under a new heading, reformulated as an issue of ethnic interrelationships in space. He has coined 'urban ethnocracy' to describe a setting in which 'a dominant group appropriates the city apparatus to buttress its domination and expansion'. This group's access to the rights of planning sees the exclusion or segregation of oppositional minority groups; the latter are housed

24 Cf. Henri Lefebvre, 'The Right to the City', in *Writings on Cities* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 147–59.

insalubriously, often temporarily, with the physical form of their deprived neighbourhood becoming the 'signifier' of the social 'other'. This is not to say that the enforcement of this othering is purely architectural. The exertion and maintenance of ethnocracy is constituted via 'forceful seizure, formal legislation, cultural discourse, and invisible apparatuses of control'.[25]

It is through his close inspection of urban ethnocracies that Yiftachel later arrives at the concept of 'gray space', which 'refers to developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between the "lightness" of legality/approval/safety and the "darkness" of eviction/destruction/death'.[26] We can narrow this broad concept down to the ontological experience of communities at the margins of urban life, neither fully welcomed into the city nor forcefully evicted from it. A combination of 'deeply embedded institutional, material and spatial systems' are said to ensure their socio-spatial fixity, including the preferential treatment of more 'favoured' counterparts — 'private "settlers" in areas of ethnic conflict, bohemians and artists in areas of urban control'. Where this framework becomes most relevant to our discussion, however, lies in Yiftachel's description of the fundamentally polyvalent nature of gray space, rich in both the negative connotations of exclusion and the possibilities of new agencies. He cites the practice of Sumood ('steadfastness') espoused by Bedouin communities in Israel's Negev desert, arguing that 'subaltern groups' tend to 'respond to their persisting oppression by articulating anti- and counter-hegemonic struggles and identities'. In this way, the conditions of life at the edge are reimagined as the necessary foundations for creating a means of resistance.[27]

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25 Oren Yiftachel, 'Urban Ethnocracy: Ethnicization and the Production of Space in an Israeli "Mixed City"', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21.6 (2003), pp. 673–93, doi:10.1068/d47j.

26 Yiftachel, 'Critical Theory and "Gray Space": Mobilization of the Colonized', *City*, 13.2–3 (2009), p. 250, doi:10.1080/13604810902982227.

27 Yiftachel, 'Theoretical Notes On "Gray Cities": The Coming of

Naturally, adjustments are necessary when bringing these lines of thought to bear on Protestantism in early modern Paris. Up until the massacres of 1572, members of the Reformed Church remained insistent on their fealty to the king. The sort of 'resistance' displayed by these men and women was enacted more in response to the silencing power of violence than to the authority of the Crown. Further, it has been noted above that these individuals were far from segregated from Catholics in their day to day. The colour of their skin, their language, and their houses were indistinguishable. Comparisons with minority groups in the Global South consequently require a good deal of caution. And yet, if Yiftachel argues that 'planning citizenship' is denied to modern gray communities, something similar can perhaps be said of the Protestants.[28] Defined as the right to determine one's own relationship with the built environment, echoes of this citizenship were evidently sought by the community in their 1559 'French Confession of Faith'. Insisting on the recurrent issue of worship houses, the leaders of the Church expressed their desire for 'a place where anyone may see what passes in [their] assemblies', so that they might 'thereby be absolved from the charge of the enormous crimes with which these same assemblies have been defamed'.[29] And while their spatial experience was typically a good deal 'darker' than it was 'light', marked more by violence than peace, it is evident that the Protestants found new ways of reinterpreting and sublimating their marginalisation by working, crucially, with the sites that confined them. It is in this way that I wish to *build* upon Yiftachel's thinking in the following section: by emphasising the inscription of space within the Protestants' assertions of strength.

Urban Apartheid?', *Planning Theory*, 8 (2009), pp. 88–100, doi:10.1177/1473095208099300.

28 Ibid., p. 90.

29 'The French Confession of Faith A.D. 1559', p. 142.



Fig. 5. *Procession de la Ligue sur la place de Grève*, oil painting by an anonymous artist, c. 1590. Currently held at the Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Reproduced from the Musée Carnavalet, via Wikimedia Commons <https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Procession_de_la_Ligue_1590_Carnavalet.jpg> [accessed 8 December 2024].



The final task at hand is to consider how experiences of 'gray space' may have offered new opportunities for the expression of agency among the Protestant community, along with the ways in which this expression was tied up with the Parisian built (and unbuilt) environment. It has been indicated once already that the community may have begun to take pride in the margins to which it was restricted. On 27 December 1561, a violent skirmish broke out in the Faubourg Saint-Médard between congregants from the Reformed Patriarch temple and Catholic priests from the nearby parish church. The former accused the latter of purposefully disrupting their services with the loud tolling of church bells. In a published account of the events, an anonymous Protestant chronicler insisted on the legality of their gathering in the suburbs — even though it was not until January of 1562 that such gatherings were officially tolerated. Later that year, Paschal recounts how Huguenots now rightfully gathered at the same temple on Good Friday 'placed […] mortar pots and clay butter pots in the windows of the house where they were assembled' so as to mimic and thus ridicule, with quite some temerity, the artillery that had been placed at the nearby Porte Saint-Jacques.[30] Undoubtedly, worship in the *faubourgs* remained a far cry from the open, more centralised expressions of faith they most desired. The Protestants' anger at Catholic noise pollution illustrates nonetheless how certain members of the community sought to protect their rights over the limited patch of land they now believed their own. Such examples as their makeshift construction of window-sill weaponry, as noted by a bemused Paschal, are further evidence of the ways in which restricted spaces were used for the articulation of presence.

Prior to these years of greater confidence, the Crown's dogged pursuit of the community seems to have elicited comparable efforts at the reinterpretation of enclosures. Falling

30 JPF, p. 13.

back on their faith, the Protestants observed parallels in the simplicity of their hideouts and the persecution that drove them outwards with the experiences of the early Christians under the yoke of pagan Rome. In this way, their martyrdom was located on a long biblical timeline of emancipated victimhood, as Raymond Mentzer has argued.[31] Chandieu writes of the ancient Church:

> Sooner we now recognise that the caverns and forests were sacred spaces, receiving such holy congregations; that the Word of God among them made of night the brightest day; and that the presence of God was more than sufficient for them to flee all the things of normal, honest men, even if this meant journeying to the edge of the world.[32]

The flock's experience of exclusionary violence from within the city walls facilitated a new, emboldening sense of proximity with the ancestry of their faith. Calvin's teachings on the flexibility of sacred spaces were moreover affirmed in the locations of their worship and the acknowledgement that their Christian forefathers had managed in much the same situation. Recounting a near miss with the city guard on 20 September 1558, reformed pastor Jo Rachamus writes: 'We fled from the city into the open countryside towards midnight, and under the light of the moon and the stars we thanked God for His having protected us from the fury of the people.'[33] Rachamus fuses wild, pastoral imagery with a statement of election; it was away from the troubles of Paris, in the innocence of the fields and the dead of the night, that he and his flock felt close to the divine.

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31 Raymond Mentzer, 'The Social Construction of Early Huguenot Identity', in *L'identité huguenote. Faire mémoire et écrire l'histoire* (XVIe–XXIe Siècle), ed. by Philip Benedict, Hugues Daussy, and Pierre-Olivier Léchot (Droz, 2014), p. 50.

32 HPM, xliii.

33 Jo Rachamus, 'Letter of 24 September 1558', in *Précis de l'histoire de l'Église Réformée de Paris* (no publisher, 1862), I, lvii–lviii.

At the extremity of this logic was the discovery of fortitude within the enclosure of the prison cell, where the trace or promise of violence was most pronounced. Held in the Conciergerie or the Châtelet, Protestant prisoners found themselves positioned at both the city's heart and its very limits simultaneously. In a letter to Calvin, pastor François de Morel paints a vivid picture of these carceral spaces, recalling how the prisoners' skin would burn and wither under the constant sunlight that shone into their dungeons. Others were held in oubliettes, described as being 'narrow, dark and absolutely deprived of air'.[34] Nevertheless, it is evident that the severity of the dungeons was manageable, even profitable, when viewed within a Reformed logic. As the young imprisoned Huguenot Jean Morel is said to have aphorised, '[m]ay no-one thus fear being taken to prison, given that it is the place in which God fully deploys his graces'.[35] Chandieu is more explicit in his reasoning:

> Since in prison, we are exempt from the fear of encountering idols in the streets; in prison, one does not have the temptations of the world before one's eyes; one can pray to God in peace and sing psalms to the Lord; *such that prisons are often more churches than prisons* [emphasis mine].[36]

The brazen conviction with which many Protestants went to their death on the pyre, preaching or singing psalms as they burned lest their tongue was cut out, suggests that these descriptions were far from affected.[37] Void of worldly distractions, at the edges of public life, cramped cells were construed as the antithesis to the excesses of the Catholic capital. In a certain

34 A. Bernus, 'Le ministre Antoine de Chandieu d'après son journal autographe inédit (1534–1591)', *BSHPF*, 37.2 (1888), p. 60.

35 Jules Bonnet, 'Trois ans de l'Église Réformée de Paris (1557–1559)', *BSHPF*, 29.10 (1880), p. 445.

36 HPM, pp. 254–255.

37 Cf. David Nicholls, 'The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation', *Past & Present*, 121, 1988, pp. 49–73.

light, their sparseness rather resembles the aesthetic ideal sought by the iconoclasts in later years, as they pillaged Catholic churches, 'purging' them of images and statues. Gathering in the *faubourgs*, retreating to the meadows, and praying in the confines of prison were far from powerless acts. Reaching back to Yiftachel's tools of interpretation, it can be said that the Protestants thus redefined the imposed limitations of gray space as ones, conversely, of strength.

Openings

At first glance, reading the plight of the Reformed Church in relation to the writings of Achille Mbembe would perhaps support the case for more synchronic approaches than the one adopted here. The closest thing to a 'disenclosure' experienced by Protestants in sixteenth-century Paris was likely the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre itself. Over the space of a few days in late August that year, all distinctions between public and private were dissolved when Catholics invaded Protestant homes, looting and slaughtering *en masse*. Mack Holt has shown that the careful delineation of borders between the two faiths was in fact key in ensuring peace during these years of civil war; Dijon remained relatively stable in 1572 on account of such precautions.[38] On the other hand, the harm caused by walls in modern conflict zones in entrenching divisions between social groups is now commonly cited. The virtues of religious pluralism — or the free, unbounded interaction of religious groups — can be celebrated today in a way that for the most part simply was not possible in early modern Europe.

The case of the Parisian Protestants remains a significant one nevertheless in this context. Although the limits that enclosed or excluded them did not crumble, the Protestants

38 Mack Holt, 'Religious Violence in Sixteenth-Century France: Moving Beyond Pollution and Purification', in *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 52–73.



Fig. 6. The Church of Saint-Médard, from Truschet and Hoyau's *Plan de Paris* (1550).

made use of difficult spaces to express identities in excess of their containers. Yiftachel has shown how cities can function in such a way as to preclude the possibility of the development of heterodox identities within them. With its processions, its preachers, and its hostile Catholic populace, sixteenth-century Paris was certainly no exception. And while the Reformed Church, banned in 1562, was ultimately unsuccessful in laying down roots in the capital, the spaces carved out by unlit streets and great stone walls appear to have allowed its constituents some resistance to the norm. In the hopes that modern cities will eventually be disenclosed, but with the acknowledgement that borders continue to be erected, we might consider the example of the Reformed community beyond its historical moment. Limits, this example suggests, can on occasion become openings.