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## 1 THE NAVARRE YEARS, 1553-62

**The Bourbon family traced its ancestry back to Louis IX, who had been king from 1214 to 1270.**

His grandson, and the son of Louis' sixth son Robert of Clermont, had been **Louis, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Bourbon**, who had lived from **1279 to 1342**.

From him the **Duchy of Bourbon had descended to Charles, the Constable of France**, who had **rebelled against Francis I**, and whose title had been forfeited in consequence.

From the first Duke's younger son, Jacques (1315-61), **a second line had descended to Charles, Duke of Vendome, who had died in 1537.**

**His son was Antoine de Bourbon.**

**The d'Albrets had no direct connection to the royal line until Marguerite, Francis I's sister married (as her second husband) Henry d'Albret, the titular King of Navarre, in 1527.**

**Most of Navarre lay south of the Pyrenees, and had been annexed by Ferdinand of Aragon in 1512.**

What remained to the north was mostly the province of **Bearn**, which had come to **Henry**, along with his title, from his mother, the **Countess of Foix**.

**Henry and Marquerite had one daughter, Jeanne, who was thus the heiress of Navarre when she married Antoine de Bourbon in 1547.**

Their son, **Henry**, was born at **Pau**, the capital of **Bearn**, in **December 1553**, and when **Henry d'Albret died in 1555**, **Jeanne became Queen of Navarre**,

**By the custom of the realm, Antoine then assumed the title King of Navarre, and when he died in 1562, that title did not revert to his mother, but was transmitted to his son, Henry – the future Henry IV of France.**

Apart from her title to Navarre, the important things about **Jeanne d'Albret** are that she was very **strong minded woman** – and that **she was a protestant**.

More accurately, **she became a protestant in 1560, as a result of some kind of conversion experience**, because her religious position before that time is ambiguous. Her mother, Marguerite, had been a keen evangelical, and her father had been more keen to keep the peace in his dominions than to strike any sectarian pose.

**Jeanne seem to have left her son in Bearn in the care of an orthodox governess. Susanne de Bourbon-Busset and returned to court soon after his birth.**

### Henry's Childhood

Henry seems to have spent most of his childhood at the Chateau de Coanraze, where he received a traditional aristocratic education, 'mistique et compagne' as it has been described.

On the **death of her father Jeanne went back to Pau**, presumably to ensure that hers (and her husband's) claim to the succession was honoured, and then again resumed attendance at court in February 1557.

Since Henry II was notoriously hostile to the Huguenots, this suggests that her orthodoxy was considered to be at least satisfactory at that time.

**Antoine de Bourbon, like Henry d'Albret before him, was much concerned to keep the peace.** He was also a **weak and vacillating man**, much given to **marital infidelities**. How he coped with his wife's somewhat strident Protestantism between 1560 and 1562 is not very clear, but he seems to have **raised no objections to his son being indoctrinated in the Huguenot faith**.

**Life at a court dominated by the Guises would have been intolerable for Jeanne, and she retreated to Bearn shortly after Henry II's death to assume direct responsibility for the upbringing of her son, by then aged about seven.**

For all his inadequacies, Antoine was a skilful and brave soldier, and that led directly to his death from wounds received while fighting on the protestant side at the siege of Rouen in October 1562.

By this time **Bearn was something of a Calvinist stronghold**, and the local nobility were undoubtedly happier dealing with the **young king Henry** who was of their own faith, to say nothing of the strong minded mother who ruled in his name, than they had been with his somewhat ambiguous father, whose Protestantism seems to have been largely nominal.

As the senior Prince of the Blood, Antoine had been in a sense the leader of the Huguenot cause, and in that role he was succeeded, not by his nine year old son but by his younger brother Henry, Prince of Conde, whose level of commitment was altogether higher.

**In 1560 the Protestant position in France was a difficult one.** There were probably about a **million** of them – **one in fifteen of the population** – but they were disproportionately strong among the **merchant**

They were in theory proscribed and **every king at his coronation took an oath to exterminate heresy**.

**Their ambivalence was well expressed by the fact that they succeeded in holding a national Synod in Paris in 1559, under the noses of the court and in spite of it being illegal.**

**In 1562 Gaspard de Coligny (admittedly a Protestant himself), claimed that there were 2,150 congregations in France, numbering about 3 million.**

This was almost certainly an exaggeration, but not an implausible one.

Until Henry II's death the royal policy, in theory one of persecution, in practice showed a good deal of pragmatism and the Huguenot congregations were not overtly politicised.

**This, however, changed with the accession of Francis II.**

At the age of fifteen, Francis was in theory capable of governing for himself, because the legal age of majority (for a king) was fourteen, and this meant that no Regent was appointed. He was, however, a sickly and rather timid youth, who immediately fell under the influence of his wife's uncles, the **Duke and Cardinal of Guise**.

**His wife was Mary, Queen of Scotland in her own right, and her regent in the northern Kingdom, until the summer of 1560, was her mother Marie, sister to the Duke and the Cardinal.**

The Guises were quite incapable of distinguishing between their own interests and those of the Kingdom, and they also knew that there would be pressures upon the young king to accommodate the Huguenots.

This pressure they were determined to counter, and partly from conviction, partly from convenience, they constituted themselves the leaders of the Ultra-Catholic party, using the authority of the Crown to issue repressive edicts against the protestants.

This politicisation of Catholicism led naturally to a reactive politicisation of the Huguenot congregations, many of which placed themselves under the protection of powerful seigneurs, and gave themselves a military face.

At the same time, in the early part of **1560** a minor nobleman - Jean du Barry, seigneur de la Renaudie – organised a plot known as the **conspiracy of Amboise** to capture the court in the Huguenot interest and eliminate the influence of the Guise.

Although it was supposedly backed by the **Prince of Conde**, this was little more than Catholic speculation, and **the plot failed** because it lacked the substance of major noble support. **Conde was arrested and condemned to death, but the evidence against him was purely circumstantial, and looks suspiciously like a counter plot by the duke of Guise.**

However, this situation was transformed in December 1560 by the death of Francis II.

He was succeeded by his brother Charles IX, a boy of nine, and a minor even by French standards.

This automatically severed the family connection with the Guises, and opened the way to a more accommodating regime.

Antoine de Bourbon waived his claim, as senior Prince of the Blood, to the Regency, and this enabled the extremely tough minded Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, to be appointed.

Catherine was a perfectly good catholic, but she took the view that a degree of religious compromise was essential for the stability of the Kingdom, and had no time for the intransigence of the Guises.

**However, as she set out to negotiate a settlement it began to become apparent that there now three rather than two positions to be taken into account.**

**First** there were the Regent's supporters, mostly moderate Catholics but including some Huguenots such as the **King of Navarre**;

**Second** there were the more committed protestants, such as the Prince of Conde (released from his sentence and from prison by the death of Francis), and Gaspard de Coligny, who were looking for victory rather than compromise;

**Third** there were the more extreme Catholics, led by the Guises, who could stomach nothing less than the total extermination of all heretics.

It also transpired in **1561** that each of these positions was represented by the head of a major noble affinity – the **Catholics by the Duke of Guise**, who was immensely strong in Lorraine and Eastern France, the **Protestants by the Bourbons**, who were powerful in central and South Western France, and the **compromisers by the Chatillons**, and particularly by the Constable, Anne de Montmorency, whose power base was more scattered.

Each of these **affinities**, and particularly the first two **had political agendas** which were **related to**, but not identical with, **their religious ones**.

**Each was concerned to turn back the centralisation of government**, which had been the work of Louis XII and Francis I, and had been driven on by the needs of their foreign wars. In spite of broadly supporting the Crown's religious policies, **the Chatillon affinity** was also in favour of a more devolved style of government.

**Consequently there were four political programmes overlapping and intersecting with three religious programmes, because the Queen Mother was naturally concerned primarily to protect the authority of the Crown.**

It was for that reason, rather than out of any ecumenical convictions, that she sought religious peace.

**If either the Guise or the Bourbon became too powerful, Catherine feared that they would tear the kingdom apart.**

**In 1561 she was convinced that the main cause of potential disruption was the persecution of the Huguenots, and for that reason she set out to obtain a measure of church reform and a limited toleration.**

To this end Catherine summoned a national synod or colloquy to meet at Poissy in September.

Rather surprisingly the hard line Catholics were divided in their attitude towards this meeting.

Whereas both the Jesuits and the papacy were bitterly opposed to any compromise, the cardinal of Lorraine was more co-operative, perhaps seeing some minor concessions as the best way to retain the catholic ascendancy.

**The Colloquy appointed a committee of ten – five from each side – to draw up a compromise formula, which was immediately rejected by both the confrontational parties, leaving the Queen Mother rather worse placed that if the Colloquy had never met.**

**Either she must enforce the laws against heresy, or by-pass them with an Edict of Toleration.**