



Huguenots Fleeing France, 1696

At least 200,000 Huguenots are believed to have fled France in the years surrounding 1685, ending up in places as far afield as North America, the Dutch Republic, England, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, and South Africa.

Huguenot Identity and Protestant Unity in Colonial Massachusetts: The Reverend André Le Mercier and the “Sociable Spirit”

PAULA WHEELER CARLO



Abstract: *Numerous researchers have noted that many Huguenots conformed to Anglicanism several decades after their arrival in North America. The situation differed in colonial Massachusetts, where Huguenots typically forged connections with Congregationalists or Presbyterians. This article explores the activities and writings of André Le Mercier (1692-1764), the last pastor of the Boston French Church, which closed in 1748. Le Mercier was an ardent supporter of Protestant unity, yet he also strove to preserve a strong sense of Huguenot identity. Nevertheless, support for Protestant unity facilitated Huguenot integration into the English-speaking majority, which fostered the demise of French Reformed churches in New England and thereby weakened Huguenot identity. Paula Wheeler Carlo is a professor of history at Nassau Community College and the author of Huguenot Refugees in Colonial New York: Becoming American in the Hudson Valley (Sussex Academic Press, 2005).*

* * * * *

The Huguenots were French Protestants who followed the teachings of the religious reformer John Calvin (1509-1564).¹ They faced persecution and even death during the French Religious Wars in the second half of the sixteenth century.² The conclusion of these wars produced the Edict of Nantes (1598), which allowed Protestants to freely practice their religion in specified areas of France. After the assassination of King Henri IV (1553-1610), a one-time Huguenot, the provisions of this Edict began to be eroded. As persecution of Protestants intensified and their faith was declared illegal throughout predominantly Catholic France in 1685, many Huguenots sought refuge in Protestant states such as the Netherlands, Dutch-controlled South Africa, Swiss city-states, the Palatinate, Great Britain, and in the British North American colonies.

Some 30 years ago the late historian Robert M. Kingdon sought to answer the question, “Why did the Huguenot refugees in the American colonies become Episcopalians?” Kingdon identifies numerous reasons for Huguenot conformity to the Church of England, which in the United States became known as the Episcopal Church after the American Revolution.³ Motivations included financial incentives; social, economic, and political advantages; gratitude for toleration and a place of refuge; and perhaps an attraction to Anglican doctrines.⁴ In the conclusion of this classic essay, Kingdon mentions yet another possible motivation for conformity to Anglicanism: the desire for Christian unity. In support of this, Kingdon cites André Le Mercier (1692-1764), the last minister of the French Calvinist church in Boston. Kingdon describes Le Mercier as “perhaps the most literate of the Huguenots to come to America.” Le Mercier had written the following in a 1732 publication:

There is a great difference between Articles of Doctrine and Points of Discipline. One may in this last respect conform himself to the ways of the Places where he liveth ... without any prejudice to his Religion and Conscience.... [As] to Articles of Discipline, we must be of a sociable Spirit, and submit to the order of the Churches among which we live; because order is not an unalterable thing ... it depends upon the circumstances of times and places; so that it may be very well said of two opposite forms, that they are both of them good.

Based on this passage, Kingdon theorizes that Le Mercier was suggesting “that there is no one way in which a true Christian church must be organized.” Kingdon further observes that

this view would not have been acceptable to English Presbyterians or Congregationalists of the period and would not have pleased many Episcopalians either. But if it was widespread among the Huguenots who emigrated to the American colonies, [it] may ... explain why it was so easy for the French refugees to discard the ecclesiastical structures to which they had been accustomed ... and which may have led them into Episcopal churches.⁵

Kingdon's speculation helps to explain the Huguenots' easy embrace of Anglicanism. But André Le Mercier, who was the pastor of a French Calvinist church that did not conform to Anglicanism, appears to be a strange example. Still, his writings and career suggest that the spirit of Protestant unity was vibrant even among Huguenots who did not conform to the Church of England. This article explores how the spirit of unity was encouraged in Le Mercier's publications, manuscript sermons, and in a cooperative presbytery that he formed with New England Presbyterians.⁶ At the same time, Le Mercier promoted a distinctive sense of Huguenot identity by emphasizing the tenacity of their religious devotion and their unique role within international Protestantism.

The Church of England is widely regarded as a Protestant denomination. Yet, it shares several characteristics in common with the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, some of its teachings and practices differed from those of the Calvinists. One of the major disagreements concerned church organization. Calvinists typically had little or no hierarchy outside of the local church and did not recognize the office of bishop or archbishop, while the Church of England recognized these offices, which is the origin for the term Episcopalian.⁷



Hugues Capet

Some believe that the origin of the term Huguenot—which was used after 1560 to refer to French Protestants—derived from the name given to those who supported claimants to the French throne who could trace their descent back to Hugues Capet, a tenth-century French monarch.

Furthermore, Calvinists observed only two sacraments: baptism and communion. Unlike Catholics, they did not believe that any of the sacraments granted salvation from eternal punishment in hell and assured entrance into heaven. The Church of England, in contrast, recognized all of the seven sacraments that the Roman Catholic Church did. But the Church of England accorded lower status to the five sacraments other than baptism and communion and referred to them as the “lesser five.” Like other Protestants, Anglicans did not believe that any of the seven sacraments conferred salvation. However, the Church of England had a more ritualistic form of worship and Anglican churches (particularly in Great Britain) were more ornate than those of the Calvinists.

What all Protestants shared in common was a belief in justification or salvation by faith rather than through works or sacraments. Simply put, this



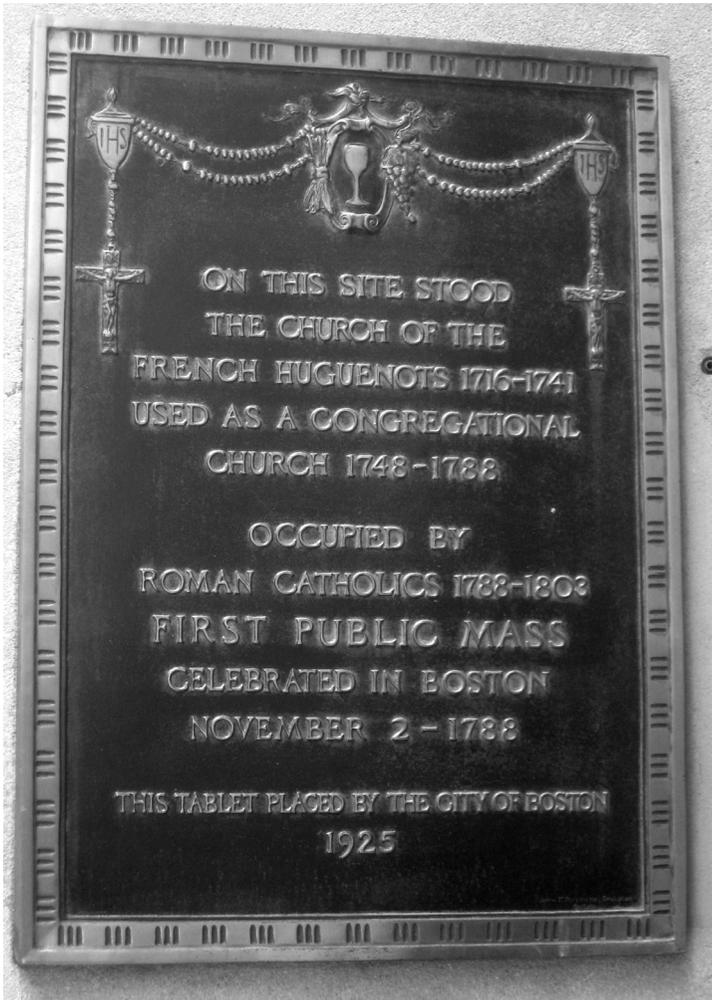
Reconstructed French Church with stone wall and burial ground, Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, NY. Boston’s “French Church” may have been similar since many churches were square in shape during the colonial period.

meant that if someone did not possess the necessary faith in God and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, no amount of good works or sacraments could save that person from eternal damnation in hell. Additionally, Protestants allowed their clergy to marry, they did not believe in Purgatory, they did not venerate or pray to saints or to the Virgin Mary, laypersons were allowed to read the Scriptures in their own language, and services were conducted in the vernacular rather than in Latin. In the early seventeenth century these differences had led to the persecution of the Pilgrims and Puritans (who strove to purify the Church of England of its “popish” practices), thus prompting many of these English Calvinists to leave their homeland.

André Le Mercier was born in Normandy, France in 1692. He completed his theological studies in 1715 at the Geneva Academy, which had been founded by John Calvin and other Protestant reformers in Geneva, Switzerland in 1559. Subsequently, Le Mercier went to London where he was recruited by André Faneuil, a prosperous Boston merchant and fellow Huguenot, to become the minister of the French Church in Boston.⁸ Le Mercier, who was proficient in French, English, and perhaps several ancient languages, arrived in Boston in 1716.

At that time, the Boston French Church was the only Huguenot church in New England. Previously there had been small Huguenot congregations in Narragansett, Rhode Island (1687-1691), and Oxford, Massachusetts (ca. 1691-1704). But as historian Jon Butler notes, these churches quickly disintegrated because of internal disputes, financial problems, and Indian attacks. Some of the Huguenots from these beleaguered settlements relocated to Boston. Consequently, after 1696 there were over forty Huguenot families living in Boston.⁹ Some of these families became well known and prosperous through their early involvement in Boston’s political and economic life. Among the more prominent Huguenot merchants were André Faneuil, James Bowdoin, and Daniel Johonnot. Faneuil was also active in politics, as were John Foy, John Barbour, and James LeBlond, all of whom were elected as city constables between 1704 and 1711.¹⁰

Le Mercier soon established himself as a respected community member and intellectual force, with several publications to his credit. He was consulted by persons outside the Huguenot community and was an essential member of Calvinist circles in New England. Despite Le Mercier’s wider connections, dedication, and intelligence, the French Church in Boston experienced dwindling membership rolls and finances. Reasons for this downturn included “intermarriage, political achievement, apparent economic success, and shifts in church membership,” which fostered Huguenot assimilation into the predominantly English population.¹¹ The decline in attendance



A plaque now marks the spot where the “French Church” in Boston once stood at 24 School Street. Today few markers remain of Boston’s Huguenot community. The plaque reads: “On this site stood the church of the French Huguenots 1716-1741. Used as a Congregational Church 1748-88. Occupied by Roman Catholics 1788-1803. First public Mass celebrated in Boston November 2, 1788.”

resulted in the sale of the church building at 24 School Street in 1748, thus marking the end of French Calvinist churches in New England. Although Huguenot refugees had also established churches in New York, Virginia, South Carolina, and elsewhere, only a few of these congregations outlasted the one in Boston.¹² Unlike most other American Huguenot ministers, who almost literally died in the pulpit, Le Mercier spent the remainder of his life at his farm in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where he died in 1764.¹³

Le Mercier's book, *The Church History of Geneva*, published in 1732, presented a perfect paradigm for Huguenot identity and Protestant unity. It was dedicated to "The Most Reverend Pastors of the Churches of Christ in New-England" in response to their frequent inquiries about Geneva and its Academy, where Le Mercier had lived and studied. He referred to the Church of Geneva as the "Mother of the other Churches" and placed the French-speaking city, French reformers, and Huguenot refugees in Geneva at the heart of the international Protestant movement. In this way, he emphasized the Huguenot sense of identity while fostering memories of their centrality to the Reformation.

Le Mercier further observed that despite "difference[s] in the way of Publick Worship," the Genevan Church has "always maintained as much as they could, a sincere Communion and a true and extensive Charity with all true Protestants of all Denominations." Thus, Protestant unity was another dominant theme. In this connection, Le Mercier provided numerous examples of John Calvin's ongoing attempts to resolve religious disagreements with Swiss reformers, Lutherans, and the Church of England. He also noted that Calvin's attempts at concord focused on the most essential doctrines and practices and allowed for the possibility of compromise on "indifferent" issues like the type of bread used in communion.¹⁴

This cooperation was often reciprocal: the Church of England sometimes consulted the religious leaders of Geneva (particularly John Calvin and his successor Theodore Beza) concerning religious controversies, and the monarchs of England and Great Britain demonstrated that they were protectors of the Church and Republic of Geneva.¹⁵ Moreover, Calvin's French Catechism was translated into numerous languages, as were forms for prayers, sacraments, and marriage to be used both within and without Geneva. In this way, Le Mercier established a mutually agreeable relationship among various sixteenth-century Protestants, with Geneva donning the mantle of religious leadership for international Protestantism and Great Britain assuming the role of defender of the faith. In accordance with Calvin's example, Le Mercier's life and publications provide ample testimony to his own efforts at collaboration with other New England Protestants, mainly

Calvinists, in the eighteenth century. Without a doubt, he was more active in this regard than any other North American Huguenot minister.¹⁶

After Calvin's death in 1564, Le Mercier's *Church History* quickly proceeded to the 1598 Edict of Nantes, its subsequent erosion after the death of Henri IV in 1610, and its revocation in 1685. Not surprisingly, Le Mercier placed the Huguenots in the forefront of seventeenth-century developments. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he returned his focus to Geneva, praising it as a refuge for poor persecuted Protestants, especially the French Protestants, in whom the "patience, zeal, and submission to God's will of primitive Christians seemed to be revived," thereby memorializing the perception of unwavering Huguenot religious devotion.¹⁷

Concerning the Huguenots' benefactors in Geneva, he contended that "there was a kindness and freeness that looked more like that of the primitive age revived, than the degeneracy of the Age in which we live."¹⁸ While Le Mercier may not have distorted the influence of French Protestants in Geneva, he ignored resentments that native residents of Geneva occasionally expressed towards resident foreigners, particularly those who tried to dominate the city.¹⁹ Perhaps Le Mercier was trying to establish implied and unspoken parallels between the Huguenot refugees who settled in Geneva and those who settled in Boston and between the people of Geneva and the people of Boston, taking care to depict all of them in glowing, if not entirely accurate, terms. Presumably, he wanted to build on the cordial relationship that the Reverend Pierre Daillé, his immediate predecessor, had had with Boston officials and Calvinist clergymen and to ensure the continued successful integration of his Huguenot congregation into the political and economic life of Boston.²⁰

Le Mercier then fused the themes of Huguenot identity and Protestant unity with the theme of anti-popery, an antipathy that was shared by all Protestants. He wrote: "While Protestants are quarrelling among themselves, the Roman Catholicks leave no stone unturned to destroy both Lutherans and Calvinists whom they hate and persecute equally."²¹ Besides strengthening their sense of identity and fostering Protestant unity, anti-popery served numerous purposes for the Huguenots. They needed to demonstrate, as historian Marco Sioli describes it, "that they were loyal subjects, as zealous in their opposition to popery as any English Protestant," and that they could be counted on as partners in the struggle against the "Church of Rome."²²

Additionally, the Huguenots wanted to diminish the possibility that they would be mistaken for French spies posing as Protestants.²³ Indeed, a Massachusetts General Court resolution in 1692 speculated that some of the Huguenot refugees were actually papists.²⁴ Moreover, as about 200

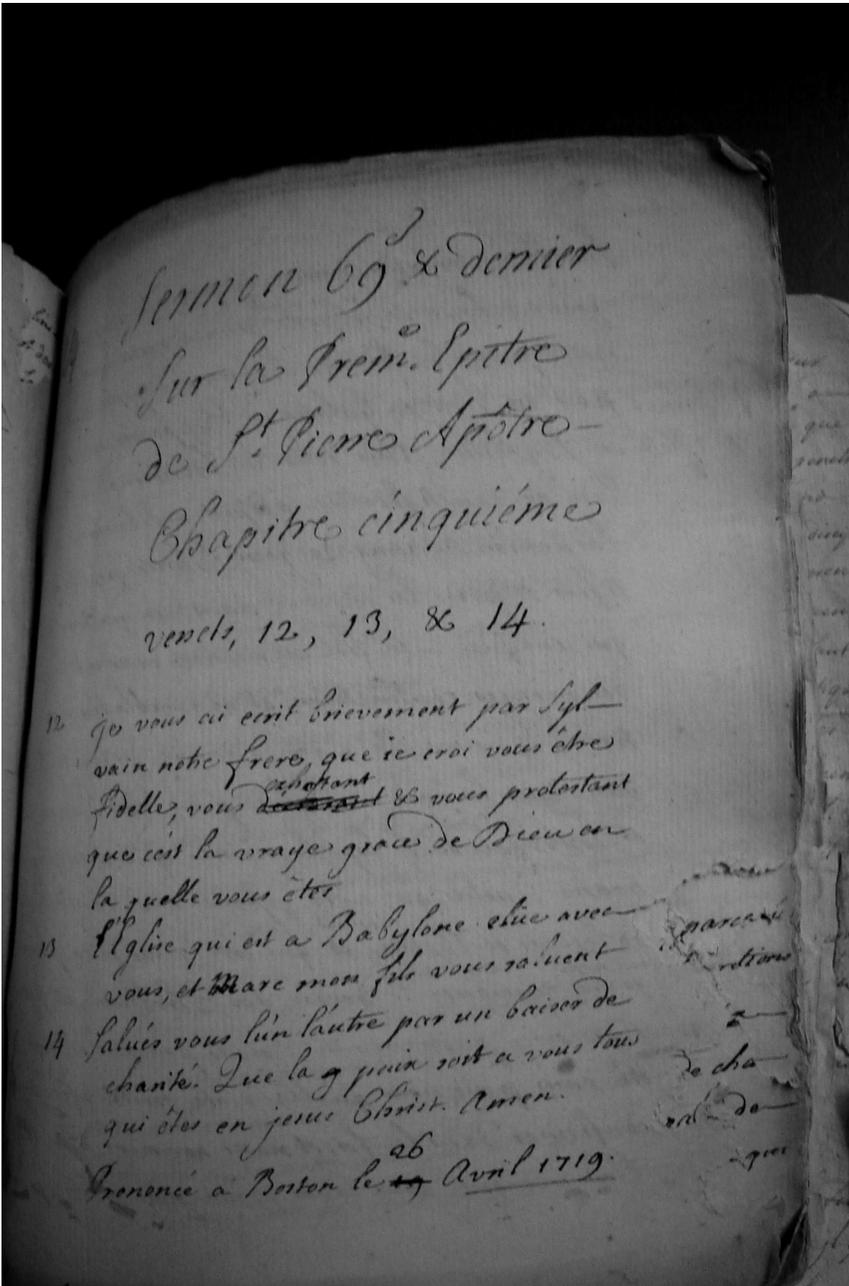
Huguenots settled in Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century, many Puritans, who did not celebrate Christmas, were perturbed by the French Calvinist celebration of December 25. In view of this and of their use of the French language during worship services, it was essential that the Huguenots establish themselves as bona fide Protestants. This was particularly crucial in colonies such as Massachusetts and New York owing to the proximity of French Canada, the ongoing imperial wars between Britain and France, and French Jesuit missionary activity in the region, which had increased since 1689.²⁵

The notion of a Protestant alliance took on even broader implications in the Atlantic world in the form of the Protestant International, a Protestant network that transcended national and denominational boundaries in opposition to the Church of Rome and those nations that espoused it. Information about Protestant causes was more effectively disseminated throughout the colonies owing to more reliable shipping and the expansion of the print trade.²⁶ Given these developments, it is not surprising that many Protestants in the New England region viewed “the world as a battleground for opposing Protestant and Catholic armies,” as historian Thomas S. Kidd puts it.²⁷ At the same time, a common Protestant front against popery facilitated Huguenot acceptance and integration into the host society in North America and elsewhere in the Atlantic world.

To be sure, anti-Catholic themes had a powerful resonance among general audiences in British North America. Colonial newspapers such as the *Boston News-Letter* were rife with stories about the depredations faced by the Huguenots in France and of their courageous resistance during the Revolt of the Camisards in the early eighteenth century.²⁸ *The French Convert*, an anti-Catholic tome featuring a lascivious Roman Catholic priest and a godly Huguenot gardener vying for the soul (and body, in the case of the priest) of a French noblewoman, enjoyed a wide audience for some 200 years. This book went through at least twenty-one American and twenty-five British editions between 1696 and 1897.²⁹

Tales of priestly lechery and debauchery appeared in André Le Mercier’s writings as well. He wrote the following about priestly conduct during the early Reformation in Geneva:

For it was then reported as a certain truth, that the Priests had resolved to Poyson the Communion Bread, in order to destroy all their Enemies at once. And the lewdness and corruption of the Popish Clergy was discovered more evidently than ever. Several Fryars and Priests were found in the Arms of their Concubines,



Title page of André Le Mercier's manuscript sermon on I Peter 5: 12-14. Reproduced courtesy of the Huguenot Society of America, 20 West 44th Street, New York, New York.

and they were carried as a show all over the Town with their Mistresses.³⁰

Le Mercier continued his line of attack against the Catholic clergy by identifying “the corruption and wickedness of the Roman clergy” as one of the main causes of the Reformation, second only to the will of God. He further argued that the clergy kept the people “in the dreadfulest Ignorance and Superstition.”³¹ Le Mercier’s reluctance to verbally attack Catholic laypersons coincides with the historian Natalie Davis’s observations about Huguenot physical attacks on Catholics during the French Wars of Religion: “As befitting a movement intending to overthrow a thousand years of clerical ‘tyranny’ and ‘pollution,’ the Protestants’ targets were primarily priests, monks, and friars.”³²

Le Mercier’s book did not appear in multiple editions, so apparently it did not have the wide and lasting appeal of *The French Convert*. But since it was written in English, there is a strong possibility that it was read by New England clerics (to whom it was dedicated). It also may have been read by their congregations and by some Protestant ministers and their parishioners outside of New England at the time it was published.³³

The Church History of Geneva served multiple purposes for the Massachusetts Huguenots. It gave Le Mercier and the relatively small Huguenot population in Boston greater visibility among English-speaking Calvinists.³⁴ English Calvinists regarded Geneva as the very essence of the shining City on a Hill and a model for all Reformed churches and communities.³⁵ The New England Calvinists had claimed that mantle in the seventeenth century in what they saw as their New World successor to Geneva, but their city had lost some of its luster by the 1700s. Additionally, Le Mercier created a book of memory and identity that placed the French-speaking city, French reformers, and Huguenot refugees in Geneva at the heart of the international Protestant movement. Further, he endowed them with the heroic characteristics of primitive Christians. By fostering these idealized notions, he tried to give the Huguenots something to live up to and non-Huguenots something to look up to.

Moreover, the themes of unity and anti-popery facilitated and strengthened Huguenot relationships with other New England Protestants. This pattern can also be found in other Huguenot places of refuge throughout the Atlantic world.³⁶ These connections were vital in Massachusetts since the Huguenot community was relatively small and surrounded by English-speaking Calvinists. By emphasizing the historical importance of the Huguenots, Le Mercier was better able to justify their ongoing centrality to the Protestant

struggle against popery. Additionally, in the eighteenth century, the Boston French Church was the only Huguenot congregation in New England. Hence, this rapid disintegration of independent Huguenot congregations underscored the urgent need to preserve the collective memory of Huguenot sacrifices and contributions (both real and exaggerated) to reinvigorate the Huguenot sense of identity.

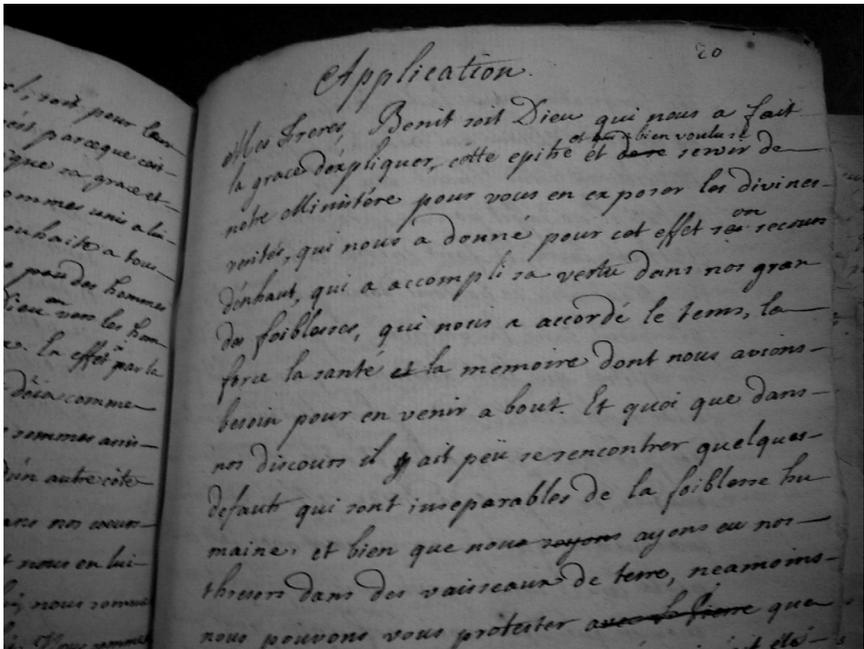
Le Mercier's congregation did not need to read anti-Catholic tomes to be inculcated with an antipathy toward the pope and the Church of Rome. They regularly ingested hefty doses of anti-popery in the form of weekly sermons. Le Mercier was not alone in this tendency since extant Huguenot sermons in other colonies evinced similar characteristics.³⁷ It is difficult to determine the extent to which sermon content influenced the hearts and minds of the people sitting in the pews, but research suggests that it had an impact. Based on his analysis of surviving lay sermon notes in colonial New England, the historian Harry S. Stout concluded, "congregations understood sermons in terms that were similar to their ministers."³⁸

In nearly every sermon, Le Mercier poignantly reminded his congregation of the Church of Rome's ongoing persecution of those Europeans who practiced the true faith. Additionally, he implored congregants to be thankful for the religious liberty that they currently enjoyed. Certainly the fragility of religious liberty must have been in the forefront of many Huguenot minds. Between 1610 and 1685, Huguenots in France had experienced an erosion of the closely-circumscribed religious liberties that had been guaranteed them under the Edict of Nantes (1598). Indeed, increased persecution and the revocation of that Edict in 1685 had provoked the Huguenot diaspora.

Throughout his manuscript sermons, Le Mercier frequently employed a general line of attack against the idea of salvation by works, a cornerstone of Roman Catholic belief that went to the heart of their theological differences with Protestants. In a sermon titled, "The Consolation of the Faithful" delivered in 1714, he remarked that "All the pains and works of the Jews during their enslavement were unable to satisfy the majesty of God. Thus He had to send his own son, who is God himself." In another sermon, he wrote, "The merits of God's son take the place of the merits of our works." Le Mercier further stressed the importance of a faith-based salvation in a sermon on fasting. He described those who practice the "false piety of external actions" as "hypocrites who are disagreeable to God." He closed by exhorting his congregation to remember their persecuted brethren in Europe, further underscoring the importance of memory and identity.³⁹ In this way, memory, identity, and anti-popery were effectively fused in his sermons as well as in his writings.

In his January 26, 1718, sermon, André Le Mercier once again discussed the role of faith in salvation as opposed to the Roman Church's approach, which he asserted was full of "errors and superstitions." Le Mercier identified some of what he considered the more prominent errors, such as reliance on the seven sacraments, especially the sacrifice of the mass; belief in Purgatory; veneration of saints; use of images; and reciting of prayers for the dead. Le Mercier's implication was that the Roman Catholic Church was a false one, in contrast to the Protestant or Reformed religion, which was the true faith like that preached by the Apostles. In contrast to the false works-based theology espoused by the Church of Rome, Le Mercier stressed that "conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit alone, when you have received grace in your heart."⁴⁰

Another scathing criticism of the Roman Catholic Church put forward by Le Mercier concerned its alleged idolatry. In one sermon, he compared the ancient Romans, who shed the blood of the children of God of the New Testament and practiced idolatry, to the ancient Babylonians, who shed the



Selected page from André Le Mercier's manuscript sermon on I Peter 5: 12-14. Reproduced courtesy of the Huguenot Society of America, 20 West 44th Street, New York, New York.

blood of the children of God of the Old Testament and, likewise, practiced idolatry. He expanded the comparison to include the contemporary Church of Rome which continued in the same path as ancient Rome by embracing idolatry and killing God's people.⁴¹

Le Mercier's attacks on this perceived Roman Catholic idolatry were disseminated to a broader audience than the French Church in Boston. In *The Church History of Geneva*, he wrote that in some respects "the way of worship" of the ancient Germans and Gauls "was more reasonable" than popery and that they "deserved praise for not using...Images in their Religious Worship." Furthermore, their "natural good Sense taught them that it was ridiculous, foolish and also injurious to God, to represent Him as a Man...."⁴² Idolatry and the slaughter of God's people were closely associated in the minds of many Huguenots. Historian Natalie Zemon Davis observes that in sixteenth-century France, Huguenots were more likely to attack religious objects or images, while Catholics were more likely to attack people, sometimes in retaliation for these desecrations.⁴³ In view of this, Le Mercier's attacks on religious images could be interpreted as a form of verbal iconoclasm.⁴⁴

Most of Le Mercier's writings were devoted exclusively to religious topics. Even his book *Some observations upon the French Tongue* (1724) managed to incorporate several references to Huguenot sufferings for the sake of religion. While written in English, it extolled the excellence and usefulness of the French language and attributed the spread of the French language to the dispersion of a "million" French Protestants seeking religious liberty and refuge from the "cruel and barbarous persecutions" in their homeland. In this instance, the markers of Huguenot identity included religious fortitude in the face of persecution and use of the French language, which was "extremely chaste and modest," unlike the Latin of the papists, which, according to Le Mercier, was "marred by filthy and base expressions."⁴⁵

Le Mercier's *Treatise against Detraction* (1733) revealed additional reasons for his emphasis on the need for a "sociable spirit," which had been promoted previously in *The Church History of Geneva*. The *Treatise against Detraction* was dedicated to his congregation and its elders, suggesting that their comportment at this time was less than exemplary. Le Mercier urged his flock to "take care not to give offense by bad conduct and vicious lives [and to] be holy examples" that the people of this land who took them in as strangers may not have a reason to repent their kindness. He also reminded them that "the pious and reverend Ministers [of New England] have readily joined with us on our Fast Days, to implore for and with us, God's Forgiveness and Peace for the remainders of the faithful in France," indicating that New

England clerics had consistently reached out to them. He further noted that “a false and blind zeal for religion and our own Party often causes Detraction [because] we think we do God service by hurting the reputation of those whom we suppose to act contrary to His glory.” Accordingly, he advised his readers not to bicker or pass judgment over minor religious differences.⁴⁶

Le Mercier’s “sociable spirit” towards other Protestants was put into action in 1729 when he and fourteen Presbyterian ministers who had migrated from Belfast, Ireland, to New England formed the Presbytery of Londonderry, sometimes known as the Presbytery of New England.⁴⁷ This concept was not completely new within international Calvinism since the *Second Book of Discipline* (1572) allowed for a common eldership or presbytery due to the shortage of qualified ministers or enthusiastic lay elders in Scotland.⁴⁸ Thus, the Presbytery of Londonderry, composed almost exclusively of Scots-Irish Presbyterians, was consistent with this discipline. Le Mercier’s participation was distinctive since he was the only Huguenot minister in the American colonies who joined a presbytery. He also appears to have been the only minister in the Presbytery of Londonderry who was not of Scotch ancestry. English Calvinists or Puritans (also known as Congregationalists) would not have joined the presbytery because they adhered to a congregational form of church governance that did not allow an outside body to intervene in local church matters.

Information about the Presbytery of Londonderry is scanty, and its functions appear to have been limited. Apparently they exercised some disciplinary functions and ordained Presbyterian ministers but did not prepare them for the ministry.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, its formation is noteworthy, especially at this time. Several Huguenot churches elsewhere in the American colonies had undergone internal conflicts in the first half of the eighteenth century and had no outside bodies to mediate these disputes. For example, in the mid-1720s, the French Church in New York suffered a bruising dispute between the church elders and the Reverend Louis Rou, one of the ministers. Rou, who had been fired from his position, turned to the civil authorities to settle the dispute and even published his own account of the proceedings.⁵⁰ In view of this, Le Mercier demonstrated more perspicacity and foresight in this cooperative endeavor than did his Huguenot counterparts in New York.

Another activity associated with the presbytery was cooperative preaching. On at least three occasions in the 1740s, presbyters preached at the Boston French Church, and their sermons were published. One of these sermons, “The Christian Warrior,” was delivered by the Reverend William McClenachan, a founding member of the presbytery. It underscored the enthusiasm and support of French and Scots-Irish Protestants for Great Britain in its wars for

empire against Roman Catholic France.⁵¹ Clearly these Calvinists perceived a strong religious element in the eighteenth-century wars for empire between Protestant Britain and Catholic France.

Regardless of the limited activities of the Presbytery of Londonderry, Le Mercier's support for it was unflagging. After the French Church in Boston was sold in 1748, he maintained his active membership in the presbytery until he died in 1764. The presbytery apparently declined after his demise.⁵²

To be sure, Le Mercier was not alone in his efforts to achieve a "sociable spirit." In addition to the prayers and fasts of ministers, there were many instances of other denominations reaching out to the Huguenots. Secular leaders positioned themselves as the protectors of persecuted Protestants, in some cases granting them the rights of naturalized citizens. Le Mercier frequently reminded the Boston Huguenots to be grateful for their many blessings, including those "valuable Privileges of Englishmen" bestowed upon them by the Massachusetts General Court in the Act of Naturalization of Protestant Foreigners.⁵³ Meanwhile, religious leaders upheld the Huguenots as exemplars of steadfast faith and courage to be emulated by their own congregations. As historian Thomas S. Kidd points out, even in the relatively tolerant atmosphere of British North America, "ministers regularly reminded their congregations of the fate of the Huguenots."⁵⁴

The influential Puritan religious leaders Increase (1639-1723) and Cotton (1663-1728) Mather, were remarkably sympathetic to the Huguenots. They published sermons about their sufferings, translated several Huguenot devotional works into English, and supported the publication of Huguenot-authored texts in the hope that the seemingly unfaltering faith of the French Calvinists would shore up the declining religious fervor of English Calvinists.⁵⁵ All things considered, few people could better attest to the evils of popery than the persecuted Huguenot refugees.

The Church of England was also very supportive of the Huguenot refugees. Therefore, Huguenots tended to be more comfortable with the Church of England than were Puritans and Presbyterians, who had been persecuted in Great Britain during the seventeenth century for their refusal to conform. For the Huguenots, Anglican inducements to conform usually took the form of the proverbial carrot rather than the stick, including money to construct a church building, pay a pastor, or hire a schoolmaster. Such enticements were very attractive to small, relatively poor congregations in rural areas. Overall, the Huguenots occupied a distinctive niche owing to their cordial associations with various Protestant denominations.⁵⁶

Le Mercier clearly believed that Huguenots should contribute to the defense of British North America and, in essence, should practice what



Paul Revere by John Singleton Copley, 1768

The Revere family represents an example of Huguenot assimilation. Paul Revere's father, Apollos Rivoire, was a Huguenot who immigrated to Boston at age thirteen and anglicized his family name before marrying. Born around 1734 and one of eleven or twelve children, Paul Revere never learned to read or speak French and fought against his father's former compatriots during the French and Indian War, as did Andrew Le Mercier Jr. Another of Boston's best-known Huguenot descendants is Peter Faneuil (1700-1743). Faneuil was a merchant and slave trader who inherited a fortune from his uncle, André Faneuil, and later financed the construction of Faneuil Hall.

they preached. In this connection, in 1745 he wrote to Brigadier William Pepperell requesting an army commission as a lieutenant for his son, Andrew Le Mercier Jr.⁵⁷ Le Mercier noted that Andrew could be of tremendous assistance because of his skills as a mapmaker and a “linguist.” The letter was written around the same time that the sermon, “The Christian Warrior,” was delivered at the French Church in honor of Pepperell. To be sure, Andrew Jr. served in the British Army during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), further demonstrating Huguenot loyalty to their place of refuge and an ability to dissociate themselves from their ancestral homeland.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, cooperative relationships with other Protestants and loyalty to Great Britain proved to be costly from the perspective of Huguenot identity. From the time of their arrival in Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century, the Huguenots strove to forge harmonious associations with other denominations, exhibiting the very essence of the “sociable spirit” that Le Mercier had promoted. But in some cases this “spirit” was embraced so wholeheartedly that Huguenots abandoned the French Church to join other denominations. Although the Boston French Church remained in existence until 1748, the size of the congregation had shrunk considerably, especially during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. More than 40 families may have attended the Boston French Church in the late 1690s; by the 1740s only seven subscribers remained.⁵⁹ Exogamous marriage and integration into Boston’s political and economic life had increasingly weakened the allegiance of Huguenot descendants. Additionally, during the eighteenth century there were only a handful of newly arrived Huguenots in Massachusetts to augment their numbers and revitalize attendance at the French Church.⁶⁰

When the Boston French Church was finally sold in 1748, the deed of sale stipulated that the building should only be used by a Protestant Church, underscoring the Huguenot sense of solidarity with other Protestants. Consequently, it was used by a Congregational Church until 1788. After that it was converted into a Roman Catholic chapel.⁶¹ Undoubtedly this development would have distressed Le Mercier had he been alive at that time.

In the final analysis, the “sociable spirit” advocated by Le Mercier and seemingly embraced by many Huguenots in colonial America was largely the result of pragmatism born of limited resources and numbers as well as of religious idealism. For most Huguenots in America, this sense of unity was concentrated on the Church of England or other Calvinist Churches, which was reminiscent of Calvin’s efforts in the sixteenth century.⁶² Still, Le Mercier’s “sociable spirit,” which urged submission “to the order of the Churches among which we live” did not necessarily preclude connections with more radical Protestant denominations.⁶³ Ultimately, however, the

ideal of Protestant unity facilitated Huguenot integration into the English-speaking majority. This, in turn, weakened the cohesion of the Huguenot community and led to the demise of French Calvinist churches in New England, an outcome that undermined the ideal of Huguenot identity.



Notes

¹ There has been much debate about the origin of the term Huguenot, without unanimous scholarly consensus about its meaning other than that it was used after 1560 to refer to French Protestants. Some possibilities are as follows: the Huguenots tended to support claimants to the French throne who could trace their descent back to Hugues Capet, a tenth-century French monarch; the name is based on the German words *eid genossen*, which means a confederacy; the word is a combination of Hugues and *genossen*. For further discussion, see Janet G. Gray, "The Origin of the Word Huguenot," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 349-59. The most convincing explanation I have encountered appeared in the memoirs of Michel de Castelnau, who lived during the French Wars of Religion. Castelnau explained that the term implied that the French Calvinists were "not worth a Huguenot, which was a small piece of money...in the time of Hugo Capet." Castelnau, *Memoirs of the Reign of Francis II and Charles IX of France*, Book II, chap. 7 (London, 1724), 74. I am grateful to Mary Bertschmann, executive secretary of the Huguenot Society of America, for pointing this out.

² The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) arose due to a variety of complex political, social, economic, and religious factors. They began because Protestant-Catholic tensions were exacerbated by disagreements over which rival noble faction should dominate the French monarchy when the heir to the throne was a minor.

³ The Church of England was (and still is) the established church in England. During the seventeenth century, all English churches were expected to "conform" to the teachings and practices of the Church of England. Because of this, dissenters such as the Pilgrims and Puritans established colonies in North America.

⁴ Robert M. Kingdon, "Why Did the Huguenot Refugees in the American Colonies Become Episcopalians?" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 49 (1980), 317-35.

⁵ Passage is from Kingdon, 334-35 and is cited directly from Le Mercier, *Church History of Geneva, in five books*. (Boston: S. Gerrish, 1732), A2. Evans, *Early American Imprints*, I, # 3557, 182-83.

⁶ The Scotch Calvinists (Presbyterians) and the French, German, and Dutch Calvinists (usually known as Reformed) permitted oversight of local congregations through a body known as a presbytery. The Pilgrims and Puritans (also known as

Congregationalists) had a congregational style of governance that did not allow outside oversight.

⁷ The term Episcopalian is derived from the Greek word for bishop.

⁸ The French Calvinist church in Boston was known simply as the French Church of Boston. The term “French Church” was usually incorporated into the name of Huguenot churches, throughout the colonies and in England. French Calvinist churches are often referred to as French Reformed, in accordance with the terms Dutch Reformed or German Reformed to refer to Calvinist churches in those nations.

⁹ For further information on these settlements, see Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 55, 60-64. Regarding the number of families in Boston, see p. 78. If the average Huguenot family had five members, there would have been about 200 Huguenots in Boston at the end of the seventeenth century.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹² The French Church in Charleston, South Carolina, never conformed to Anglicanism and still holds an annual French Reformed service in the French language. The French Church in New York was closed during the American Revolution, reopened in the 1790s, and became Episcopalian in the early nineteenth century. Currently, weekly services alternate between French and English at L'Église Française du St. Esprit in New York. There were two French Churches in New Rochelle, New York, which was originally settled by Huguenot refugees in the 1680s. One church became Anglican in the early eighteenth century; the other was a French Reformed church until it became Presbyterian in the nineteenth century.

¹³ Most people worked until they died or became disabled during the colonial period. Apparently, Le Mercier's farm provided most of the necessary support for his family. He had also received financial bequests when several wealthy Boston Huguenots died and was given some of the proceeds from the sale of the church building in 1748. Most of the biographical information about Le Mercier is from Butler, 83-90.

¹⁴ Le Mercier, *Church History*, 202, 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁶ For example, Butler noted that Le Mercier was the only Huguenot minister in the colonies to participate in a presbytery. Butler, 88. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke did not uncover a significant level of inter-denominational cooperation on the part of Huguenot ministers in South Carolina. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006). My own research on the New York Huguenots has not found extensive inter-cooperation to be typical. Paula Wheeler Carlo *Huguenot Refugees in Colonial New York: Becoming American in the Hudson Valley* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Le Mercier, *Church History*, 196.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Historian E. William Monter contended that “the total intellectual impact of the French refugee colony ... would be difficult to exaggerate.” *Calvin’s Geneva*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), 173–74. Additionally, Alister McGrath noted the tremendous influence of Huguenot refugees on industries in Geneva, including publishing, clock and watch manufacturing, and the drapery trades. *A Life of John Calvin*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 228. Some of the conflicts and resentments are discussed in Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, (Yale University Press, 2002), 99. McGrath likewise indicated that “Genevans disliked the presence of foreigners.” *Life of John Calvin*, 198.

²⁰ Daillé served as a pallbearer at the funeral of Puritan cleric Cotton Mather’s second wife. Butler, 79. Butler also commented on the remarkably early entry of some Huguenots into Boston politics as well as their successful participation in the mainstream of Boston’s economic life. *Huguenots in America*, 80–81.

²¹ Le Mercier, *Church History*, 204.

²² Evan Haefeli and Owen Stanwood, “Jesuits, Huguenots, and the Apocalypse: The Origins of America’s First French Book,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 116, 1 (2006): 68. Many Protestants used the term “Church of Rome” when they referred to the Roman Catholic Church, because it implied pagan corruptions of its doctrines.

²³ For further discussion, see Haefeli and Stanwood, 63–68.

²⁴ Marco Sioli, “Huguenot Traditions in the Mountains of Kentucky,” *Journal of American History* 84 (March 1998): 1322.

²⁵ For further analysis see Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst’: World News, Anti-Catholicism, and International Protestantism in Early-Eighteenth-Century Boston,” *New England Quarterly* LXXVI, 2 (June 2003): 266.

²⁶ The concept of a “Protestant International” has been discussed in a number of publications in recent years. For example, see J. F. Bosher, “Huguenot Merchants and the Protestant International in the Sixteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 52, 1 (Jan. 1995): 77–102; Robin Gwynn, “The Huguenots in Britain, the ‘Protestant International’ and the Defeat of Louis XIV,” *From Strangers to Citizens: The Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland, and Colonial America, 1550–1750*, ed. Randolph Vigne and Charles Littleton (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 412–24; Kidd, “Let Hell and Rome,” 266, 268. Local newspapers were published in Boston starting in 1690.

²⁷ Kidd, “Let Hell and Rome,” 266.

²⁸ The Camisards, who lived in the Cévennes region of southern France, practiced a more emotional and apocalyptic faith than did most Huguenots. They revolted because of ongoing persecution by the French government.

²⁹ Thomas S. Kidd, “Recovering *The French Convert*: Views of the French and Uses of Anti-Catholicism in Early America” *Book History* 7 (2004): 101, 104.

³⁰ Le Mercier, *Church History of Geneva*, 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

³² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 174. A similar pattern of attacking church officials

rather than laypersons, who are to be pitied for their fear and ignorance, can be found in the sermons of Huguenot ministers in colonial New York. Carlo, *Huguenot Refugees*, 85-94.

³³ Le Mercier was not the first Huguenot minister in North America to publish a book with a strong anti-Catholic bias. The anti-popery connection had been promoted previously in a 1690 publication by the Reverend Ezechiel Carré, one of Le Mercier's predecessors at the Boston French Church. For a modern analysis of Carré's *Echantillon: De la Doctrine que les Jésuites enseignent aux Sauvages du Nouveau Monde*, see Haefeli and Stanwood, 59-119. Even before these Huguenot publications appeared, Protestants of other denominations had railed against the "Church of Rome." Anti-popery did not completely dissipate after the colonial era. It continued to attract an audience from many native-born Americans as unprecedented numbers of Catholic immigrants arrived in the United States in the nineteenth century. In some instances, this prejudice continued well into the twentieth century. For example, in 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy had to assure voters that his policy decisions would not be dictated by the Vatican.

³⁴ The total population of Boston in 1700 was about 6,700. The Huguenot population in Boston at that time may have been about 200. Based on tax records, Jon Butler calculated that there were over 40 French families living in Boston in the late 1690s. *Huguenots in America*, 78. The figure of 200 persons is based on my estimate of an average family of five persons. Calculating the "Huguenot" population in Boston in the eighteenth century is difficult because of exogamous marriages to non-French persons and movements to other churches. The number is usually based on people with a family name of French origin, whether or not they attended the French church.

³⁵ This perception of Geneva was noted by Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 225.

³⁶ For further analysis see Luc Racaut, "Religious Polemic and Huguenot Self-Perception and Identity, 1554-1619," *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559-1685*, ed. Raymond Mentzer and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42-43.

³⁷ For an overview of anti-popery in the sermons of the Reverend Pierre Stoupe in New Rochelle, see Carlo *Huguenot Refugees*, 85-94. For anti-popery in the sermons of the Reverend Louis Rou in New York, see Paula Wheeler Carlo, "The Huguenot Soul: The Calvinism of Reverend Louis Rou" *The Religious Culture of the Huguenots, 1660-1750*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 113-18.

³⁸ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 317, fn. 7. Stout's analysis did not include French Reformed churches, but it is not inconceivable that sermons had a similar effect on Huguenot congregations.

³⁹ Le Mercier, Sermon 16. Only pages 10-13 are extant. Le Mercier, Sermon 2, "Sur le jeune du 22 March 1716." Both sermons are available as consecutively-numbered original manuscripts in a bound volume at the Huguenot Society of America Library,

New York. All sermons are written in French. Translations provided by the author of this article.

⁴⁰ Sermon 8, "Sermon on Luc 22:32." The first two pages of this sermon are missing.

⁴¹ Sermon 14, "Sermon 69 on I Peter 5:12-14."

⁴² Le Mercier, *Church History of Geneva*, 11-12.

⁴³ Davis, *Society and Culture*, 152-83 passim.

⁴⁴ Some European Calvinists had gained notoriety for physically destroying religious images in churches.

⁴⁵ André Le Mercier, *Some observations upon the French Tongue* (Boston: B. Green, 1724), 10-11. Available electronically in Evans, I #39811. The reference to a million refugees is greatly overestimated. More reliable estimates vary from 160,000 to 300,000. Jon Butler estimated the figure to be around 160,000. *Huguenots in America*, 1. This number is on the low side since it only considers those who fled between 1680 and 1690. For the comparison between French and Latin, see Le Mercier, *Observations upon the French Tongue*, 6.

⁴⁶ All quotes are from André Le Mercier, *A Treatise Against Detraction, in ten sections*. (Boston: Henchman, 1733), iii-iv, A3, and 58-59, respectively. Also available electronically in Evans, I, #3673.

⁴⁷ Charles A. Briggs. *American Presbyterianism* (New York: Scribner's, 1885), 228. A presbytery is a general assembly composed of ministers and representative elders, which has oversight and jurisdiction over member congregations within a certain area. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. Presbytery. ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, Oxford University Press, 1997. Some Calvinist churches (Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, German Reformed) have a Presbyterian system of governance. Others (Congregationalists such as the Pilgrims and Puritans) do not. The Huguenot (French Reformed) churches in the colonies had individual church consistories that presided over disciplinary and financial matters within that local church but which had no authority over other churches. Thus, in the colonies they operated more like the Congregational churches rather than the French Calvinist churches in Europe, which had outside bodies for oversight.

⁴⁸ Michael F. Graham, "Social Discipline in Scotland, 1560-1610," in *Sin and the Calvinists: Morals Control and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition* edited by Raymond Mentzer, vol. 32 of *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* (Truman State University Press, 2002), 132.

⁴⁹ Alexander Blaikie has noted that it lacked vitality and did not prepare young men for the ministry. *A History of Presbyterianism in New England* (Boston: Alexander Morse, 1882), 131-32.

⁵⁰ For an overview of the problems in New York City, see Carlo, "Huguenot Soul," 110-12. There were also disputes in the New Paltz, New York, church. See Carlo, *Huguenot Refugees*, 48-54.

⁵¹ There may have been more instances of cooperative preaching, but the only documentation I could find was three published sermons preached at the "French Meeting-House in Boston" in 1742 and 1745. The speakers were the Rev. John

Caldwell and the Rev. William McClenachan. One of Caldwell's sermons was "On the Scripture Characters of False Prophets." His second sermon concerned "Rash and Uncharitable Judging." In the published appendix to this sermon, Caldwell criticized the judgmental characteristics of popular revivalist preachers of the time, including Gibert Tennent. McClenachan's sermon, "The Christian Warrior," was preached in honor of William Pepperell, an Army general and commander-in-chief. These sermons are available electronically in Evans, I #4909, 4910, 5622.

⁵² Blaikie, 37.

⁵³ For example, see Le Mercier, *Treatise Against Detraction*, A3.

⁵⁴ Thomas S. Kidd, "Recovering *The French Convert*": 101.

⁵⁵ Examples include Increase Mather, "A sermon wherein is shewed that the Church of God is sometimes a subject of great persecution ... occasioned by the tidings of a great persecution raised against the Protestants in France" (1682); Ezechiel Carré, *Echantillon: De la Doctrine que les Jésuites enseignent aux Sauvages du Nouveau Monde* (1690), with a preface by Cotton Mather. Cotton Mather also translated and transcribed the devotional writings of Elias Neau, a Huguenot merchant who was condemned to galley slavery and then imprisoned in France. Mather, *A present from a farr country, to the people of New England* (1698). These publications are available electronically through Evans, I.

⁵⁶ The historiographical consensus for the period 1714-1770 is that this was a time of "comparative religious peace, consensus and 'protestant unity'; a kind of 'ecclesiastical analogue' to the J. H. Plumb thesis of the 'growth of political stability.'" Peter B. Nockles, "The Waning of Protestant Unity and Waxing of Anti-Catholicism?" *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832*, ed. William Gibson and Robert G. Ingram (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005), 179. See fn. 1 of this chapter for additional references. The financial difficulties and the assistance offered through Anglican conformity are discussed in detail for the French Church in New Rochelle, New York in Carlo, *Huguenot Refugees*, 54-69, 78-94.

⁵⁷ Pepperell was the general and commander-in-chief of the Army sent from New England against the French-controlled, fortified town of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

⁵⁸ Several letters from Le Mercier to Pepperell have been published in the *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*. The letter mentioned above appears in *MHS Collections*, sixth series, vol. 10, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1886-99), 102-103. There are also more prominent examples of Huguenot civic-mindedness such as Peter Faneuil's generous donation in 1742 to build a new town hall, which resulted in the construction of Faneuil Hall. (The extremely wealthy Peter was the nephew and heir of André Faneuil who had recruited Le Mercier for the Boston French Church.)

⁵⁹ Butler, *Huguenots in America*, 73, 78, 88. The term "subscribers" implies family heads, so the total number of attendees was probably larger than seven. Church records are not extant for the Boston French Church, which makes it difficult

to determine precise numbers. Butler also documented declining attendance at Huguenot churches in New York and South Carolina.

⁶⁰ This was also the case in other colonies as well, although some French-speaking Swiss Reformed arrived in New York in the eighteenth century and helped to keep the New York French Church viable for a longer time. Butler, *Huguenots in America*, 195-96.

⁶¹ The building was converted to a Roman Catholic chapel in 1788. Abiel Holmes, *Memoir of the French Protestants Who Settled at Oxford in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1826), 62. Rhea Hollis Atwood, *Boston's French Secrets: Guided Walks that Reveal Boston's French Heritage* (Bennington, VT: Images from the Past, 2004) contains several walking tours that examine a variety of French influences in Boston, including the site of the French Church and homes of prominent Huguenot residents.

⁶² Calvin had sometimes included Lutherans in his efforts.

⁶³ Quote is from Le Mercier, *Church History*, 182-83. Neil Kamil, for one, has identified Huguenot-Quaker connections in early New York. *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots' New World, 1517-1751* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 767 ff.