

ELLEN WHITE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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In her portrayal of the history of Christianity, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation*, Ellen G. White recounts the history of the French Revolution. She notes that the French Revolution was actually “a war against the Bible, carried forward for so many centuries in France,” and which eventually “culminated in the scenes of the Revolution.”¹ One of the early crises pointing toward the French Revolution was the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of the Huguenots on August 24, 1572. At one point in her narrative, White states:

But blackest in the black catalogue of crime, most horrible among the fiendish deeds of all the dreadful centuries, was the St. Bartholomew Massacre [of the Huguenots]. . . . The king of France . . . lent his sanction to the dreadful work. The great bell of the palace, tolling at dead of night, was a signal for the slaughter. Protestants by thousands, sleeping quietly in their homes, trusting to the plighted honor of their king, were dragged forth without warning, and murdered in cold blood.²

Second, White, commenting on the results in terms of human suffering from the prohibition of the Bible in France during the period leading up to and including the French Revolution, states:

He who obeys the divine law will most truly respect and obey the laws of his country. He who fears God will honor the king in the exercise of all just and legitimate authority. But unhappy France prohibited the Bible, and banned its disciples. Century after century, men of principle and integrity, men of intellectual acuteness and moral strength, who had the courage to avow their convictions, and the faith to suffer for the truth,—for centuries these men toiled as slaves in the galleys, perished at the stake, or rotted in dungeon cells. Thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation.³

Third, in another place, White cites J. A. Wylie’s *The History of Protestantism*:

“Then came those days when the most barbarous of all codes was administered by the most barbarous of all tribunals; when no man could greet his neighbors, or say his prayers . . . without danger of committing a capital crime; when spies lurked in every corner; when the guillotine was long and hard at work every morning; when the jails were filled as close as the holds of a slave-ship; when the gutters ran foaming with blood into the Seine. . . .

¹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan*, 1888 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1907), 272.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 278.

While the daily wagon-loads of victims were carried to their doom through the streets of Paris, the proconsuls, whom the sovereign committee had sent forth to the departments, reveled in an extravagance of cruelty unknown even in the capital. The knife of the deadly machine rose and fell too slow for their work of slaughter. Long rows of captives were mowed down with grape-shot. Holes were made in the bottom of crowded barges. Lyons was turned into a desert. At Arras even the cruel mercy of a speedy death was denied to the prisoners. All down the Loire, from Saumur to the sea, great flocks of crows and kites feasted on naked corpses, twined together in hideous embraces. No mercy was shown to sex or age. The number of young lads and of girls of seventeen who were murdered by that execrable government is to be reckoned by hundreds. Babies torn from the breast were tossed from pike to pike along the Jacobin ranks.⁴

White follows Wylie's quotation with the comment that "In the short space of ten years, millions of human beings perished."⁵

In regard to these quotations, William S. Peterson raises an intriguing question: "Do these historians [such as Wylie] have any attitude or bias in common which might explain why Ellen White was attracted to them?"⁶ Peterson's question flows from his concern regarding the accuracy of White's statements. For instance, in regard to the first quotation above, Peterson calls into question White's statement that the beginning of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was signaled by the tolling of the "great palace bell." Peterson contends that

It was pointed out to Mrs. White that this was inaccurate, and in 1911 the phrase was changed to "a bell" (p. 272). . . .

In fact, the error was a result of a simple misreading by Mrs. White of her original source before 1888. Wylie (volume 2, p. 600), upon whom Mrs. White was drawing at this point in the chapter, wrote that "the signal for the massacre was to be the tolling of the great bell of the Palace of Justice." Two pages later in his book, Wylie explained that in the event it was the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois which was rung. Obviously Mrs. White had read the first statement but not the second, for she displayed confusion also about the time of the night when the bell sounded.⁷

In regard to White's second quotation, Peterson states that

An even more revealing inaccuracy is one which was never corrected. In the sixteenth century, she wrote, "thousands upon thousands" of Protestants "found safety in flight" from France (1911 edition, p. 278). Then the following paragraph is a lengthy quotation from Wylie. Had she read Wylie more carefully, she would have noticed, immediately preceding the statement which she quoted, this sentence: "Meanwhile another, and yet another, rose

⁴White, 1888, 284.

⁵Ibid.

⁶William S. Peterson, "A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen G. White's Account of the French Revolution," *Spectrum* 2/4 (1970): 60.

⁷Ibid., 64.

up and fled, till the band of self-confessed and self-expatriated disciples of the Gospel swelled to between 400 and 500" (Wylie, volume two, p. 212). Wylie himself is given to hyperbole in discussing Catholic persecutions; and when one compounds his exaggerations with Mrs. White's, the distance from historical reality is very great indeed.⁸

Peterson further explains that

This particular error by Mrs. White is an interesting one, because it is possible to reconstruct how she misread Wylie. Wylie cites the 400 or 500 "self-expatriated disciples of the Gospel" and then goes on to assert: "The men who were now fleeing from France were the first to tread a path which was to be trodden again and again by hundreds of thousands of their countrymen in years to come. During the following two centuries and half these scenes were renewed at short intervals." Mrs. White reduces all of this information to one sentence and thereby distorts it: "Thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation." In other words, Mrs. White removes Wylie's "hundreds of thousands" of Protestant exiles from the "following two centuries and half" and instead places this enormous group in the sixteenth century.⁹

Finally, in regard to the third quotation, Peterson claims that White's statement about the number of people massacred in the French Revolution is also inaccurate. He states: "This is not the only instance I have found of carelessness by Mrs. White in transcribing material from her sources."¹⁰ He goes on to explain that White's errors are not simply "minor changes in wording or punctuation, for these are not worth our notice; but obvious inaccuracies of fact, which in their cumulative effect, undermine the historical basis of the chapter."¹¹ What are the errors that Peterson finds White most guilty of committing? He clarifies: "Most of her errors, however, are in the direction of exaggeration. In 1888 she had spoken of the 'millions' who died in the French Revolution; in 1911 this was scaled down to 'multitudes' (p. 284)."¹²

The purpose of this article is to consider Peterson's contentions concerning the acumen of White in recording the history of the French Revolution. Was she exaggerating, either intentionally or not, the toll of the revolution on France's population? Were her remarks concerning the beginning of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre correct? In order to answer these questions, I shall examine the historical backgrounds surrounding the three White quotations: the ringing of the bell, marking the beginning of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre; the exodus from France of "thousands upon thousands" in response to the events leading up and including the French Revolution; and the question of whether "millions" died as a result of the French Revolution.

⁸Ibid., 65.

⁹Ibid., 68, n. 25.

¹⁰Ibid., 64.

¹¹Ibid., 64.

¹²Ibid., 65.

*The Ringing of the Bell, Marking the Beginning of
the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*

If we look at the dreadful massacre that took place on Sunday, August 24, 1572, we find that historians paint a scene of horror and panic. However, the fact that panic and horror are such an integral part of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre makes it more difficult—but not completely impossible—to reconstruct fairly well what actually transpired.

What signaled the beginning of the massacre of Huguenot faithful on that dreadful night? Don Fernando de la Mina, an eyewitness, was at the Louvre when the massacre began. He recounts how he and his staunchly Huguenot friend, Bernard Palissy, looked down on the scene from their apartment:

Palissy and I stood and looked from our studio window down into the streets of Paris that evening and, as we looked, they seemed to us unusually quiet as if the city were waiting for some grim happening! Late into the night we stood there, Palissy and I, watching the traffic grow less and less, as the streets became more and more deserted. The lights in the houses were extinguished one by one as the unsuspecting inhabitants retired to their rest, and presently all Paris seemed to be wrapped in peaceful slumber. It was very nearly midnight. "What's that?" suddenly asked my companion, as he drew back from the window in sudden alarm—"What's that?" "It's the Palace Bell," I replied—and the words were no sooner out of my mouth than the echoing tocsin rang out from the Tower of St. Germain l'Auxerrois nearby.¹³

That the St. Germain bell is mentioned as nearby clearly suggests the Palace bell, which rang first, was not as near to De la Mina's apartment in the Louvre, which agrees perfectly with the location of the Louvre in relation to the Palace of Justice and St. Germain l'Auxerrois. Another witness to the events on St. Bartholomew's Day was the youth, Jacques-Auguste De Thou, who later became a French statesman and historian. He relates that the Chevalier d'Angouleme said: "Cheer up my friends! Let us do thoroughly that which we have begun. The king commands it." De Thou then states: "He frequently repeated these words, and as soon as they had caused the bell of the palace clock to ring, on every side arose the cry, 'To arms!' and the people ran to the house of Coligny."¹⁴ This witness also clearly points out that it was the ringing of the palace bell that signaled the slaughter.

¹³Don Fernando de la Mina, *My Escape from the Auto De Fé at Valladolid, October 1559* (Poland, ME: Shiloh, 1997, reprint), 106. De la Mina, a Spanish nobleman who escaped the Spanish Inquisition by fleeing to France, bequeathed his son with a sealed document in which his life story was told. De la Mina, who was also a skilled artist, was employed in Paris as Embroider to Her Majesty the Queen, Regent of France. In 1572, the year of the massacre, he lived in a comfortable apartment in the Louvre. His friend, Bernard Palissy, produced exquisite pottery. Cf. Sylvia Lennie England, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew* (London: John Long, 1938), 88; Henri Noguères, *La Saint Barthelemy*, trans. Claire Eliane Engel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 69.

¹⁴Jacques-Auguste De Thou, *Historie des choses arrivees de son temps* (Paris, 1659), 658 sqq, as cited in *Modern History Sourcebook*.

It is a good possibility that Catherine de Medici, who took the lead in this cruel plot, waited for the stroke of midnight from the nearby clock of the St. German l'Auxerrois and then gave an order to ring the Palace bell as the signal for the assault to begin, which, in turn, prompted the tolling of other bells across the city. The historian W. Andringa Gz. pieces the details together in the following way:

The tolling of the bell of the Palace of Justice, so it was decided, would be the sign for murder. . . . Twelve dull strokes were heard of the clock of St. German l'Auxerrois. The festal day of the holy Bartholomew was begun. . . . [T]he cruel Queen, at midnight, ordered that the sign for the assault be given. There resounded the ominous tones through the air. . . . The tolling of many bells sounded through the atmosphere and called the sons of the holy church to the crusade against the heretics, the Huguenots, the apostates. All, all would be exterminated.¹⁵

Other historical sources provide further details. For instance, R. Husen recounts that "Towards midnight everything was regulated by the gang. In the following St. Bartholomew's Day a pistol shot was fired. The Louvre bell starts tolling. The murderous scenery begins."¹⁶ H. A. van der Mast states that "In the night between the 23rd and 24th of August 1572, just after midnight, by a pistol shot the sign was given for the horrible murder. At once the bells of the palace started tolling."¹⁷ John Dowling notes that "At length the fatal hour had arrived. All things were ready. The tocsin, at midnight, tolled the signal of destruction."¹⁸ J. H. Landwehr also places the fatal stroke at midnight: "At the stroke of twelve of the church tower clock, all Huguenots that could be found in Paris were suddenly, with the help of the military power, murdered in a horrible way."¹⁹ According to D. P. Rossouw, "It was decided that Coligny should die first. As soon as possible after midnight by a pistol shot and the tolling of the Palace bell the sign should be given and immediately the conspirators would meet and begin the slaughter."²⁰ H. Lankamp notes that "The church-tower clock of St. Germain struck the midnight hour; suddenly a pistol shot rang out from the palace: the

¹⁵W. Andringa Gz., *Gekeurd en Gelouterd, Het leven, lijden en sterven der Martelaren* (Utrecht, Joh. De Liefde, 1895), dl. II, 362-364. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of non-English texts are my own.

¹⁶R. Husen, *Geschiedenis der Hervorming in de 15de, 16de en 17de Eeuw* (Doesburg: J. C. van Schenk Brill, 1903), 550.

¹⁷H. A. van der Mast, *Beelden en Schetsen uit de Kerkgeschiedenis* (Amsterdam: H. A. van Bottenburg, 1906), 351.

¹⁸John Dowling, *The History of Romanism*, 14th ed. (New York: Edward Walker, 1847), 588.

¹⁹F. W. Grosheide, J. H. Landwehr, C. Lindeboom, J. C. Rullmann, *Christelijke Encyclopaedie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925), dl. 1, 239.

²⁰D. P. Rossouw, *Mede-erfgenamen van Christus, Geschiedenis van de vervolgingen der Christelijke kerk* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1894), 614.

agreed sign; the massacre begins; Coligny, the noblest, is the first victim.”²¹ J. H. Kurtz states: “On the night of St. Bartholomew, between the 23rd and 24th of August, the castle bell tolled. This was the concerted signal for the destruction of all the Huguenots present in Paris.”²² However, as George Park Fisher records, “In the night of August 24th the massacre began. Coligny and other prominent Huguenots were first slain by the Duke of Guise and his associates. Then one of the great bells of the city rang out the signal to the other conspirators.”²³ Will and Ariel Durant provide further details as to the original plan of action, which was superseded by Catherine’s command to proceed: “[The military was to] be ready for action at the tolling of the church bells at three o’clock [a.m.]. . . . [A]t the tocsin’s sound their men were to slay every Huguenot they could find. . . . Catherine yielded and ordered the tocsin to be rung.”²⁴ Henri Noguères notes that “Far from allowing matters to take their own course, Catherine meant to keep control of them. To begin with, she did not wait until the Law Courts bell rang at the agreed hour, an hour and a half later. She ordered the tocsin to be sounded at once. She ordered the big bell of St. Germain l’Auxerrois to be tolled.”²⁵ *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia* proposes that: “²⁶After Coligny had been murdered, a bell in the tower of the royal palace, at the hour of midnight, gave the signal to the assembled companies of citizens for a general massacre of the Huguenots.”²⁶

It is obvious from the above historical portrayals of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre that there is no clear harmony as to the given sign for the slaughter. Further, there is no certainty, either, about the total number of victims, the numbers of which range between 6,000 and 100,000. Thus, in view of existing uncertainties, it is far from fair to accuse White of errors because she misread Wylie, her chosen source in these quotations.

C. P. Hofstede de Groot, in his preface to the Dutch edition of Wylie’s *History of Protestantism*, makes clear that in the description of the night of Bartholomew, Wylie has not always been followed since he contradicts unchallengeable testimonies.²⁷ Now if this is really the case, then it is even more

²¹H. Lankamp, *Leerplan voor de Scholen met de Bijbel, Geschiedenis van Kerk en Zending* (Groningen, P. Noordhoff, 1914), deel I B, 223.

²²J. H. Kurtz, *Church History* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889), 2:328.

²³George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner’s, 1916), 339.

²⁴Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 7, *The Age of Reason Begins* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 351.

²⁵Noguères, 79, 80. As to this statement, there is no source mentioned nor any reference given.

²⁶*Chambers’s Encyclopaedia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1895), 1:765.

²⁷C. P. Hofstede de Groot states: “Het meest heb ik de auteur kunnen volgen in zijn verhaal van de lotgevallen van het Protestantisme in Frankrijk—ofschon niet in zijn beschouwing van de Bartholomeusnacht, die geheel tegen onwraakbare getuigenissen indruist” (*De Geschiedenis van het Protestantisme, opnieuw verhaald door Dr. J. A.*

evident that White cannot be accused of misreading Wylie's description.

Could it not be possible that White, instead of misreading the source, was guided in a more truthful way? Hofstede de Groot has included the passage that the bell of the Palace of Justice would give the sign for general murder,²⁸ but the statement that someone was sent at two o'clock in the morning to ring the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois is left out of Hofstede de Groot's Dutch translation. Hofstede de Groot seems to have had a good reason for not including the second statement, and since many other historians do not mention this either, it may be doubtful that the second event really happened as stated by Wylie.²⁹ Hofstede de Groot indicates that several bells signaled the massacre: "The Louvre bell tolled and other bells added their gloomy tones"³⁰ as the execution proceeded.

Wylie. *Voor Nederland vrij bewerkt door Dr. C. P. Hofstede de Groot* [Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1881], Derde Deel, Voorrede.

²⁸"Dan zou de klok van het Gerechtshof het teken geven tot de algemene moord" (Wylie, trans. Hofstede de Groot, Deel 3, 87).

²⁹It is noteworthy to mention that Wylie refers to De Thou (Jacques-Auguste) for this information, who writes, without giving any credit for his source, that "Therefore the Queen laying hold of his present heat, lest by delaying it should slack, commands that the sign which was to have been given at break of day should be hastened, and that the Bell of the nearer Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois should be tolled" (Meredith McGann, *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: A Religious Reaction in 16th Century France* [n.p.: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History, National History Day Curriculum Book, 2002], Excerpt 2. However, De Thou, as indicated earlier in this article, elsewhere points out that it was the ringing of the palace bell that signaled the slaughter. Philippe Erlanger writes: "The bell of the Palace [of Justice] would give the signal." He provides a source: *Archives Nationales, registers of the Hôtel de Ville*. He also writes that "The queen-mother suddenly made up her mind that the Palace of Justice was too far away, and that the tocsin, the signal, should sound from the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois." No reference is given, however, and no source is mentioned (*St. Bartholomew's Night [Le Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy]*, trans. Patrick O'Brian [New York: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd., and Pantheon, 1962], 151, 154). Sylvia Lennie England mentions twice that the "Palais de Justice" bell was to give the signal for the attack, but she also describes that it was the church bell of "Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois" that clanged out the tocsin. Once again, however, no reference or proof is given for these statements (*The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew* [London: John Long, 1938], 97, 101, 103).

³⁰"Men begon.' zo als Guise antwoordde, 'reeds overal in de stad te executeren.' De klok van 't Louvre luidde, de overige klokken voegden hare sombere tonen daarbij" (Wylie, trans. Hofstede de Groot, Deel 3, 88). It is noteworthy to mention that Wylie refers to Jacques-Auguste De Thou for this information, who writes, without giving any credit for his source that "Therefore the Queen laying hold of his present heat, lest by delaying it should slack, commands that the sign which was to have been given at break of day should be hastened, and that the Bell of the nearer Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois should be tolled" (Meredith McGann, *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: A Religious Reaction in 16th Century France* [n.p.: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History National History Day Curriculum Book, 2002], Excerpt 2. However, De Thou, as indicated earlier in this article, elsewhere points out that it was the ringing of the palace

It seems clear that Wylie's description of the timing and the given signal for the massacre to begin are not quite according to what actually happened. Although he served as White's principal historical source in her chapter on the French Revolution, she did not follow him blindly. Rather than being in error for misquoting or misunderstanding Wylie, the evidence seems to suggest that White purposefully did not include Wylie's mistakes in describing the events surrounding the beginning of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Thus her comment that "The great bell of the palace, tolling at dead of night, was a signal for the slaughter," seems to be correct³¹ and is also borne out by some historical sources.

The Exodus from France of "Thousands upon Thousands"
in Response to the French Revolution

Peterson accuses White of making a deviation from Wylie when she states that "thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation."³² Peterson levels two charges: error in stating that "thousands upon thousands found safety in flight"; and distortion, by compressing two sentences into one and thereby skewing Wylie's intended meaning. Was White exaggerating and distorting history with her comments in this particular case?

A brief examination of history reveals that France was one of the countries most fiercely afflicted by religious crusades, persecutions, and wars. For instance, in the sixteenth century, during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547), the Evangelical Church of Meaux was dispersed "and by her refugees the seed of the new faith was sown everywhere."³³ Because of a bloody persecution in Provence in 1545, "Some thousands passed over the mountains to Geneva."³⁴

bell that signaled the slaughter. Philippe Erlanger writes: "The bell of the Palace [of Justice] would give the signal." He provides a source: Archives Nationales, registers of the Hôtel de Ville. He also writes that "The queen-mother suddenly made up her mind that the Palace of Justice was too far away, and that the tocsin, the signal, should sound from the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois." No reference is given, however, and no source is mentioned (St. Bartholomew's Night [Le Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy], trans. Patrick O'Brian [New York: George Wweidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd., and Pantheon, 1962], 151, 154). Sylvia Lennie England mentions twice that the "Palais du Justice" bell was to give the signal for the attack, but she also describes that it was the church bell of "Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois" that clanged out the tocsin. Once again, however, no reference or proof is given for these statements (The Masacre of Saint Bartholomew [London: John Long, 1938], 97, 101, 103).

³¹White, 1888, 272.

³²Ibid., 278,

³³J. Chambon, *Geschiedenis ener Martelaarskerk* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre NV, 1951), 31.

³⁴Ibid., 33.

And a decade and a half later again thousands settled in another country. "Under Francis II (1559-90) thousands of Huguenots settled in the Netherlands."³⁵ Their churches were known as "churches of refuge," the first being established at Strassburg in 1538. "In 1575 the French refugees in this city alone were numbered 15,398."³⁶

From the massacre at Vassy, in 1562, to the time of Henry II (1574-1589), eight religious wars "depopulated and destroyed" France.³⁷ J. Chambon notes that immediately following the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day "a new stream of emigrants begins to leave the country in such a measure that about half a year after the Bartholomew's night, in London alone were forty fugitive pastors from Normandy and Picardy."³⁸ These pastors would not have easily left their flocks to their fate; thus it would be self-evident that these believers were scattered and also had taken to flight. Describing this desperate situation, W. Andringa comments: "Overcome with indescribable fright the remaining Huguenots left the country; all roads were crowded with refugees who tried to escape to England, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany."³⁹ Robert M. Kingdon writes: "After the massacres large numbers of French Protestants, particularly from Normandy and other provinces on the English Channel, made their way to safety in English territory."⁴⁰ Reportedly large numbers of refugees and crowded road conditions speak of a great exodus from France. However, this was not the case only in the sixteenth century. White adds that this exodus "continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation."⁴¹ Since White evidently, according to the historical evidence, did not exaggerate about the numbers of people fleeing, was she then exaggerating about the fact that the exodus continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation?

George Park Fisher, speaking of the period following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, states: "In 1685, the Edict of Nantes, the great charter of Huguenot rights, was revoked. Emigration went on in spite of hindrances placed in its way. Not far from a quarter of a million of refugees escaped from France to enrich England, Holland, and other countries with the fruits of their industries."⁴² In 1697, yet another new religious persecution

³⁵Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909), 5: 398.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Chambon, 56-57.

³⁸Ibid., 75.

³⁹Andringa, 374-375. Cf. Adolf Streckfuss, *De Geschiedenis der Wereld* (Leiden: Firma Van den Heuvel & Van Santen, 1871), dl. 7, 329.

⁴⁰Robert M. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 1572-1576* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 126; see also 21.

⁴¹White, 1888, 278.

⁴²Fisher, 494. Cf. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1926), 556.

began in France. D. P. Rossouw notes that “in Langeudoc alone were 40,000 Protestants who had to leave their native country.”⁴³

According to the *Dictionary of American History*, “Henry IV granted religious toleration to his Protestant subjects by the Edict of Nantes (1598), but Louis XIV revoked it in 1685. During periods of persecution, approximately 300,000 French Protestants fled to Prussia, Switzerland, Holland, England, and the Dutch and English colonies.”⁴⁴ The *History of International Migration* adds that “At least 200,000 French Huguenots left France between the end of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century. After 1520 until the end of the 17th century: 300,000-400,000 French migrated.”⁴⁵ During the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), the Huguenots were reduced to a persecuted, martyred church. Louis XIV “drove thousands of their numbers into exile, to the lasting gain of England, Holland, Prussia, and America.”⁴⁶ Oehninger agrees, stating that “Already at his accession to the throne Louis XIV had begun to oppress the Protestants and hundreds of thousands of them had sought refuge in Switzerland, Germany, England and the Netherlands. At the repeal of the Edict of Nantes this emigration was prohibited. However, fifty thousand families still succeeded in escaping.”⁴⁷

In the Netherlands, “Amsterdam alone had 15,000 Huguenots toward the end of the seventeenth century, while about 60,000 were settled in other cities and provinces.”⁴⁸ However, these persecuted people did not flee only to European countries—thousands of Huguenots also found refuge in the United States: “By the close of the seventeenth century thousands of Huguenots had settled in New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina and Pennsylvania.”⁴⁹ Arthur H. Hirsch states in a footnote that “Estimates of the total Huguenot exodus from France to

⁴³Rossouw, 659.

⁴⁴Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Dictionary of American History*, 3d ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 2003), 4: 190, s.v. “Huguenots.” The *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that “over the next several years” following the Edict of Nantes, “France lost more than 250,000 of its Protestant citizens. They fled primarily to England, Prussia, Holland, or America” (*Micropaedia*, 15th ed., 5:189, s.v. “Huguenots”).

⁴⁵*The History of International Migration*, Leiden University <www.oshel.com>, see esp. 1.4 “How Many? Western Europe, France.”

⁴⁶Walker, 441.

⁴⁷Friedrich Oehninger, *Geschiedenis des Christendoms* (Rotterdam: J. M. Bredée, 1899), 452. See also Husen, 630-631, who states that in the seventeenth century France lost, during the reign of Louis XIV alone, “more than fifty thousand families that were successful in passing the boundaries. . . . But thousands upon thousands, as we have seen, followed their shepherds and enriched the countries that took them in with their diligence and industrial art.”

⁴⁸Macauley Jackson, 5: 399.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

other parts of the world vary from 300,000 to 1,000,000.”⁵⁰

White’s statement that “thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation” is not exaggerated: 300,000–400,000, or perhaps even 1,000,000, Huguenot refugees made an exodus from France that extended from about 1520 until the 1790s.

Did “Millions” Die During the French Revolution?

Is it really unlikely two million people died in the fierce and bloody French Revolution? At the time of the Revolution, there were approximately twenty-five million people living in France. Therefore, could it not be true that after ten violent years two million people could have lost their lives? For instance, Will and Ariel Durant note that “Before the Vendéans were subdued by Marshal Hoche (July 1796), half a million lives had been lost in this new religious war.”⁵¹ The Durants’ description alone accounts for a vast multitude of people who lost their lives as a result of the French Revolution. If we consider that the horrible massacres during this period often went on without benefit of trial or mercy, and that no one was spared regardless of age or gender, then the possibility of two million lives lost is not without merit. The Durants note that “They [the ruling powers] put down opposition without mercy, sometimes with enthusiastic excess.”⁵²

A zealous commissioner, Jean-Baptiste Carrier, declared that

France could not feed its rapidly growing population, and that it would be desirable to cure the excess by cutting down all nobles, priests, merchants, and magistrates. At Nantes he objected to trial as a waste of time; “all these suspects (he commanded the judge) must be eliminated in a couple of hours, or I will have you and your colleagues shot.” . . . [T]he prisons at Nantes were crowded almost to asphyxiation by those arrested and condemned. . . . “We will make France a graveyard,” he vowed. . . . “[W]e shall all be guillotined, one after another.”⁵³

At one time, there were as many as 400,000 prisoners.⁵⁴

Manon Roland wrote on August 28, 1793: “France has become a vast Golgotha of carnage, an arena of horrors, where her children tear and destroy one another. . . . Never can history paint these dreadful times, or the monsters that fill

⁵⁰Arthur H. Hirsch, *The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 3 n.

⁵¹Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization: The Age of Napoleon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 11: 72.

⁵²Ibid., 11: 68.

⁵³Ibid., 11: 68–69.

⁵⁴Georg Weber, *Lehr- und Handbuch der Welgeschichte* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1921), 4:44.

them with their barbarities.”⁵⁵ Thousands were guillotined. The Durants cite Fouquier-Tinville, who “remarked that heads were falling ‘like slates from a roof.’”⁵⁶

The political parties of France—the Girondins, Jacobins, and Royalists—murdered each other. It was, at a given moment, a matter of “to slaughter or be slaughtered.”⁵⁷ In 1792, for instance, the September Massacre took place, “in which numbers of Royalists were killed, not only in Paris, but also in Orleans, Lyons and elsewhere.”⁵⁸ In March 1793, the revolutionary tribunal was set up to deal with all political offenders. The *Concise History of the World* states that “Jacobin deputies were sent into the provinces to find suspected persons and once suspected and denounced there was little hope. . . . At Nantes the massacres took the form of tying the condemned together . . . and then throwing them into the sea.”⁵⁹

No place was safe from the effects of revolution. Even in out-of-the-way places in the countryside the cruel massacres raged on. From the small village of Bedouin (or Bédoin), located some twenty miles northeast of Avignon, the following report was made:

The details of cruelty which are continually arriving from France are truly incredible. . . . And this day, Jan. 9th, 1795 we read the following account. . . . Goupilleau of Montaign, just returned from his mission in the Southern Departments, gave the following account of the horrors exercised upon the inhabitants of the Commune of Bedouin. . . . “A young maiden, of the name of Saumont, only eighteen years of age, waited upon a Deputy, to demand the release of her father. ‘From whence comest thou?’ asked the barbarian. ‘From Bedouin,’ answered she. She was immediately put under an arrest, and two days after, she mounted the scaffold, along with her father. . . . You shrink with horror at this narrative, and had you been like me, at Bedouin, you would carry with you to the grave the remembrance of the cruelties of which that Commune had been the theatre and the victim. At Orange I ordered a hole filled with five hundred dead bodies to be closed up. I also ordered some others to be filled, which were destined to receive twelve thousand human victims. Four thousand loads of quick lime had already been brought to consume those bodies. In the same Commune, they guillotined an old woman, in her eighty-seventh year, and who had been delirious six years, and infants between ten and eighteen years of age.”⁶⁰

That similar horrible butcheries also took place elsewhere in the country is clearly attested: “[H]orrible assassinations are still prevailing [July 1795] to a considerable degree, particularly in the provinces of Languedoc and Provence.

⁵⁵Durant and Durant, 11: 66-67.

⁵⁶Ibid., 11: 80.

⁵⁷Oehninger, 456.

⁵⁸*Concise History of the World* (Great Britain: P. R. Gawthorn, 1935), 558.

⁵⁹Ibid., 561.

⁶⁰David Simpson, *Key to the Prophecies* (Halifax: Milner & Sowerby, n.d.), 379-380.

Aix, Nismes, and Tarrascon are much afflicted in this way.”⁶¹

We should not underestimate the heavy loss of human life that was suffered throughout France during this bloody and graceless period. If we take the whole period of the French Revolution into account, with its several dramatic and bloody outbursts on the political, social, economic, and religious levels, and if we add all the victims together, it should not be surprising to find that approximately two million people lost their lives during this horrible and disorderly period of time. If there are still some who doubt the veracity of this point, Oehninger states that “in September 1793 [alone] there were no less than 40,000 revolutionary tribunals, thousands of hangman’s assistants and places where daily 30 or 40 people were murdered.”⁶²

If there were 40,000 tribunals with thousands of hangman’s assistants and places where 30 to 40 people were killed daily, how many murdered victims would there be after this level of killing was carried on for several months? I will venture a modest calculation. If we average a total of just one hundred victims for each tribunal and then multiply that by the stated number of tribunals in 1793, which numbered 40,000, there is a possibility that a total of four million people lost their lives. Thus White’s description of “millions” dying in the French Revolution appears to be very true indeed, without any taint of exaggeration.

Conclusion

In portraying the events of the French Revolution, it is clear, just as with other parts of history, that the events as they happened are not always agreed upon in perfect harmony among historians. This very fact should keep us from drawing hasty conclusions. A reexamination of the historical data, however, demonstrates that Ellen White’s grasp of the French Revolution falls within the accepted interpretations of historians recording that tumultuous period. Her choice of sources and data appears to be deliberate, pointing toward a more-than-naïve understanding of the material. Thus it is fascinating to discover that there is ample evidence to substantiate the historical particulars of White’s description of the events leading up to and through the French Revolution.

⁶¹Oehninger, 456.

⁶²Ibid.