



May 25, 1559

It is hard to envision being a French Protestant in May 1559. Some pastors and ministers elected from groups of Reformed churches were accompanied by Elders from those churches similarly elected. They arrived on foot or horseback or carriage. They came from Paris, and from towns in northwestern, central, southern and south-western France, to attend the First National Synod of the Reformed Church or *Synode Premier National des Eglises Reformées de France* in Paris. The men travelled in some secrecy since they were subject to the increasingly draconian laws promulgated to suppress the heresy of Protestantism. Books, printed material, and speech were severely censored. The last of the edicts to repress the Huguenots was the Edict of Compiègne issued in July 1557. It mandated the death sentence for all Calvinists.

Despite the repression of Henri II, the Reformed faith was spreading quickly in France, among women and men, nobles, aristocrats, and ordinary, mostly middle class persons. Still the men entering Paris for the Synod would have done so cautiously.

We do know from the cover of the printed proceedings that the groups of churches represented were located at: St. Lo, Dieppe, Angers, Orléans, Tours, Poitiers, Saintes, Marennes, Castelheraud, and St.-Jean d'Angeli. The Synod was convened from May 25-28, 1559 by François Morel, the pastor of the Church of Paris. An influential contributor to the Synod was Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, a friend and pupil of Jean Calvin. Calvin had sent a draft confession of faith and three delegates to Paris. But it was the Synod and Chandieu that gave the confession its final forty articles.

The philosophy of Jean Calvin is reflected in the final Gallican Confession of Faith or *Confession Fidei Gallicana* namely presbyterian form of church governance, the adoption of two sacraments only (Baptism and the Lord's supper), and rejection of the Pope and all papal councils, conclaves, synods, etc. except for the first three so-called Ecumenical Councils: Nicene 325, Constantinople 381, and Ephesus 431. Otherwise the Confession maintains orthodox Christian beliefs about God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. Finally, the confession included two articles addressing the institution of government by God and the need to obey the laws, pay taxes, bear arms, and otherwise respect those in authority.

The Confession of Faith with a preamble to the king was sent first to Henri's son, Francis II at Amboise in 1560. The poet, historian, translator, theologian, lawyer, and Greek professor, Theodore Beza from Geneva, presented the Confession of Faith at the Colloquy of Poissy to another son of Henri II, Charles IX in September 1561. By October 1561, it was clear that there would be no reconciliation of the Roman Catholics and the Calvinist Reformers. The Confession of Faith was adopted by the Synod of La Rochelle in 1571, and finally sanctioned by King Henri IV. The Confession of Faith in French and English is available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.vii.html>.