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Praying against the Enemy
Imprecatory Prayer and Reformed Identity from the Reformation to the Early Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT Contrary to the rule of charity but having some biblical basis, imprecatory prayer and the practice of asking God to act against enemies have always been controversial. In sixteenth-century confessional conflicts, however, any reluctance to use such prayers faded. During the Wars of Religion the first theological justifications appeared and cursing prayers were provided to worshippers. Alongside other practices these prayers shaped the collective identity of the French-speaking Reformed people. They clearly discriminated the faithful from God's enemies, expressed the hope that divine providence would act against these enemies, and led people to identify their fate with that of Old Testament Hebrews. Yet from the end of the seventeenth century such prayer was gradually rejected, above all by learned Reformed people who saw tolerance as a new characteristic feature of Reformed identity.

KEYWORDS prayer, confessionalization, Wars of Religion

The process of confessionalization during the early modern period, which involved the construction of collective identities, relied on a wide array of instruments of persuasion and inclusion—for example, preaching, images, and the broad distribution of printed works as well as liturgical rites.[1] In this context, the specific function played by the practice of prayer—whether the prayers were spoken or sung, whether they were public, domestic, and/or individual in orientation—has been given insufficient attention. Yet prayer was crucial to the formation and evolution of a collective Reformed conscience.

Even though the historiography on prayer is relatively sparse, several historians have built on the foundational works of Marcel Mauss and Frédéric Heiler to explore the specific contributions prayer made to the construction of

1. Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*.

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religious identities.[2] In particular, Patrick Henriet, Michel Lauwers, and Virginia Reinburg have illuminated the "efficaciousness" of prayer as a means of building "social consensus."[3] In articles devoted to the mass and prayer, John Bossy precisely analyses how at the end of the medieval period praying often reinforced spiritual identities by articulating a clear distinction between friend and foe: the interplay of formulas and liturgical processes (*clamor*, memento mori) allowed the simultaneous expression of solidarity with friends by praying in their favor and rejection of enemies either directly—praying for their damnation—or indirectly, by including their name in the list of the dead for whom one prayed.[4] Eamon Duffy has similarly observed, with regard to the Books of Hours, that domestic spiritual practices permitted the faithful to pray for themselves and their friends, as well as against their enemies.[5]

Both Duffy and Bossy acknowledge that the custom of using prayer to curse one's enemy or several of them at once, though well documented, was always considered problematic. Imprecations were contrary to Christian charity and specifically at odds with certain passages of the New Testament, such as the Sermon on the Mount, which rejects curses and recommends that the Christian pray for the souls of his enemies (Luke 6:27–28; Romans 12:14; James 3:10). Nevertheless they made their way into well-established medieval Christian practices. Between the end of the tenth and the middle of the thirteenth centuries, for example, monks in particular used *clamors* and curses to defend their properties against local lords.[6]

The question of whether Christians were permitted to pray against their enemies was far from "secondary" for the first theologians of the Reformation, in particular because the recovery of the Old Testament texts that can be interpreted as permitting cursing during a time marked by religious conflict rendered the imprecations contained within them especially relevant and appealing.[7] This article examines the specific manner in which the issue of imprecatory prayer was addressed during the Reformation, a period of religious rupture in which appealing for providential succor against the "enemies of the faith" was thought more and more imperative even as doing so exacerbated religious tensions. It uncovers how French-speaking members of the Reformed tradition

2. Mauss, "La prière (1909)"; Heiler, *La prière*.

3. Henriet, "Prière, expérience et fonction au Moyen Age"; Henriet, "Invocatio sanctificatorum nominum"; Lauwers, "La prière comme fonction sociale"; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*.

4. Bossy, "Essai de sociographie de la messe"; Bossy, "Prayers."

5. Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 32, 101–3.

6. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*; Palazzo, *Liturgie et société au Moyen Age*, 198; Zimmermann, "Le vocabulaire latin de la malédiction."

7. Lienhard, "Prier au XVIe siècle," 53–54.

reappropriated biblical sources and instrumentalized them within a framework of confessional polarization, in the process elaborating an original corpus of spiritual works, including prayers and hymns, that the faithful mobilized to fight their religious opponents.

For members of the Reformed faith prayer assumed a very particular role in the formation of their communal and collective identity. First, the use of the vernacular, strongly defended by Calvin in his epistle "to faithful readers" and included from 1543 on in all editions of the Huguenot psalter, expressed a communal manner of practicing "communication between God and us"—the definition of prayer that Calvin provides in his catechism—and distinguished their liturgical culture clearly from that of Catholics. Second, large numbers of this same psalter, a foundational text of Reformed practice, were circulating during the 1560s, and it provided a list of prayers available to all faithful. These prayers were all modeled on the same liturgical structure, which established clear linkages between domestic/individual prayers and collective/public prayers. The psalter thus functioned as an instrument of continuity and coherence, collapsing distinctions between prayers practiced individually and collectively.[8] Finally, the long prayer of intercession spoken after the sermon during public services on weekdays and on Sundays included prayers requesting divine aid not only on behalf of pastors and magistrates but also on behalf of all the persecuted faithful and Reformed communities exposed to "tests." Prayer thus created a liturgical space to express spiritual solidarity that linked Reformed communities despite their geographic dispersion. In both its content and its ritual form, prayer was an essential tool for unifying Reformed communities. It thus replaced and compensated for the absence of a strongly unified ecclesiastical structure and functioned as an essential cultural and spiritual link between congregations.[9]

After a period in which speaking prayers involving curses and invectives was strictly regulated, with the beginning of the Wars of Religion this reticence disappeared and a large number of texts calling for divine punishment of "enemies of the faith" began to circulate. During this time, these texts played an important role in the construction of a collective Reformed conscience, characterized by a hardening of boundaries between the faithful and its enemies and by the identification of Reformed Christians with Old Testament figures. During a third stage, beginning at the end of the seventeenth century, Reformed identity inverted itself and increasingly rejected formulas involving imprecation. The time when the temptation to curse prevailed over the commandment to be

8. Grosse, "'Que tous cognoissent et entendent ce qui se dict et faict au temple'"; Ferrer, *Exercices de l'âme fidèle*.

9. Grosse, "Liturgische Praktiken und die Konfessionalisierung."

charitable was thus a parenthesis in the history of Reformed churches that corresponded exactly with the period of confessionalization.

Echoing the Western Christian tradition, especially that of the church fathers and Saint Augustine, was Calvin, who declared, "This is the prayer of the faithful against the iniquitous," and then demonstrated with an explicit reference to Genesis (12:3) a direct connection between human and divine cursing: "God fights for us . . . : following the promise that he will bless those who bless us. And on the contrary, it must be concluded that he curses all those who curse us."[10]

In the context of the confessional warfare described in these sermons, overall tolerance for imprecatory prayer continued to increase. The evolution of the liturgy of the cult of prayer in *La forme des prières ecclésiastiques* exemplifies this tendency. In the final part, where "Turks and Pagans" were evoked, a later 1548 edition accentuated the text's confessional dimension by adding "papists and the other infidels" at the end. This evolution was reinforced in 1552 when a new paragraph was inserted in this same final section: the officiant prays henceforth that God supports those who fight for his cause by "upsetting all the stratagems and conspiracies of their enemies."[11] After 1552 this prayer ceased to evolve, and contemporaries accepted it as the chief means by which the faithful prayed "against the enemies of God and his church."[12]

This shift in the practice of imprecatory prayer became even more marked in France at the end of the 1550s, as Reformed churches were first established in the kingdom and prayer against enemies was integrated into Reformed worship. At that time we see both the traditional recourse to psalms and the creation of new texts in which the divine was not only implored to protect or save the faithful but also explicitly asked to intervene with punishment and vengeance. Different stages in this evolution are identifiable. Texts containing a request for divine vengeance and cursing confessional adversaries were first written during the 1550s, a decade in which martyrs to the Reformed faith were sacrificing their lives and Reformed churches gained a foothold in France. This phenomenon continued at the beginning of the following decade, as the kingdom began its rapid descent into religious war.

In 1550 Théodore de Beza published his famous *Abraham sacrifiant*, one of the most important texts written during his exile in Switzerland. The "Canticle of Abraham and Sara," which appears at the beginning of the tragedy, already

10. Calvin, *Deux sermons*, fol. A7r.
11. Grosse, *Les rituels de la cène*, 647.
12. Beza, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, 4:92–93 (May 23, 1562).

takes the form of a vociferous demand for vengeance: "The perverse should tremble," Abraham and Sara say to Catholic idolaters,

> And you, lord the true God,
> leave one day from your place,
> that we may be avenged
> of all your enemies.[13]

This tendency in Beza's text was also visible in the corpus of Reformed spiritual songs that began to take shape in the 1530s under the leadership of Matthieu Malingre.[14] In the 1555 published edition, even the titles of the songs in his *Recueil de plusieurs chansons spirituelles* echo the increasingly violent nature of confessional conflict. Many are structured as prayers inspired by a psalm and demand that God exercise his vengeance by destroying the church's enemies. Yet even as some prayers in this collection call for such violence, the text itself acknowledges that these appeals are in tension with the divine commandment for charity. After having demanded that the "avenging hand" of God strike the enemy and that "he bear a worthy punishment," for example, the prayer simultaneously acknowledges the excessive character of this request.[15] Although a certain reticence concerning the use of curses clearly remains, overall this collection of Protestant spiritual songs signals a "hardening of theological positions and a confessionalization of the language of the faith."[16]

Even as prayers of vengeance and cursing remained subject to these tensions, they became more frequent at the end of the 1550s and the beginning of the Wars of Religion.[17] Also in the early 1560s Huguenot armies began to form and texts that sought to justify the armed mobilization of the Huguenot nobility began to be produced. These documents outlined the rules and regulations governing the conduct of these armies, including the practice of the prayer among the soldiers.[18] As early as 1562 the *Prieres ordinaires des soldatz de l'armée conduites par monsieur le Prince de Condé* were published and quickly reissued the following year. Adapted for the troops of the Prince de Condé and based on the Genevan liturgy as described in *La forme des prières ecclésiastiques*, these prayers transform the soldier into an instrument of divine "just judgment." Encouraging the soldiers to identify their cause with God's will, the prayers nevertheless

13. Beza, *Abraham sacrifiant*, 48.
14. Ullberg, *Au chemin de salvation*, esp. 215–16, 256–61, on the role of the "enemy" in this literature.
15. *Recueil de plusieurs chansons spirituelles tant vieilles que nouvelles*; Pineaux, "Poésies protestantes," 798.
16. Ferrer, "La chanson spirituelle," 49.
17. See, e.g., Bordier, *Le chansonnier huguenot du XVIe siècle*, 2:207.
18. Soulié, "Les prières aux armées de Condé."

generally adopt a moderate tone: justification of the army's "actions" and of the soldiers' disciplinary regime predominates over verbal violence. During the Second War of Religion these prayers were reedited and published in a volume printed at La Rochelle in 1568. Not only does this new edition present a more extensive set of prayers, but, just as important, the tone of the prayers breaks with the more moderate and measured one that prevailed earlier. One of the new prayers, for example, addressed to "the God of the armies" asks him to "confound all the plans and forces of our enemies."[19]

If we see here disparate indications of a hardening and confessionalization in the spiritual literature during the 1560s, this tendency became more dominant during the subsequent decade. Although wailing and lamentation, as well as the themes of repentance, consolation, and the memento mori, dominated Reformed spiritual production during this period, texts in which the enemy is central or which resonated with calls for divine vengeance became more frequent.[20] In this literature, a veritable line in the sand was crossed. While some reticence persisted, appealing to God as an avenger became acceptable and from this point forward more commonplace.

Here a convergence of spiritual practice occurred and was expressed in three types of texts: the Huguenot psalter, Reformed spiritual literature, and Reformed spiritual songs directly inspired by the psalms. In all editions of the psalter, "arguments" are offered at the heading of each psalm that summarize its overall meaning and indicate how the psalms are to be used. Some of these summaries authorize singing psalms when confronting an enemy and occasionally explicitly permit the faithful to turn to them "against the perverse, noxious, and malicious men who with money and with force oppress the good and the weak" (Psalm 9) or in order that God "punish the malice and cruelty of his enemies" (Psalm 55).[21] We know that French Huguenots effectively used the psalter in this way, particularly during the Wars of Religion.[22] Barbara Diefendorf emphasizes that the Huguenots were not merely content to employ biblical songs as a means of self-identifying and maintaining their own internal cohesion but also composed new texts that borrowed directly from the rhetoric of the psalms and edited them so that they could easily be sung to the melodies contained in the psalter. Some of these new compositions call directly for divine vengeance.[23]

This phenomenon appeared in a particularly striking fashion after the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres. The canticles of the Reformed poet Etienne

19. *Prieres pour les soldats et pionniers de l'Eglise reformee.*

20. Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France*; Jeanneret, *Poésie et tradition biblique*; Pineaux, *La poésie des protestants de langue française*; Ferrer, *Exercices de l'âme fidèle*; Gœury, "Les pasteurs poètes."

21. Marot and Beza, *Les psaumes en vers français avec leurs mélodies*, 26, 55.

22. Reid, "Battle Hymns of the Lord Calvinist Psalmody."

23. Diefendorf, "Huguenot Psalter."

de Maisonfleur reject all restraint about using imprecations and openly call for "divine vengeance." One dated August 30, 1572, asks for violence against "the tyrants of France" in terms that seem directly inspired by the Apocalypse (Ap. 14: 18–20):

> Turn around, O God, and destroy them
> the phials of your wrath
> on these enraged dogs
> who in their wild fury
> weighed down by their murders
> take vengeance on them in your glory
> give them blood to drink
> Because their bloody hands,
> covered in their own acts of vengeance
> drenched in Red
> in the blood of your saints.[24]

The *Cantiques* that the pastor of Barbezieux, Etienne de Malescot, published in Pons in 1590, are in the same vein.[25] The Reformed poetic school, led by Simon Goulart, that formed in Geneva during the last third of the sixteenth century produced for its part poetry suited for the battlefield.[26] This group of authors wrote texts that evoked a climate of religious conflict in which war against the enemy within—the temptations of the flesh—and war against the enemies of the church were confused, which proved particularly propitious for the writing of imprecatory texts.[27] The Champagne poet Pierre Poupo, for example, who considered himself the "eulogist of the Protestant party," "had a particular predilection for two themes which demonstrated his spiritual engagement: imprecations against the enemy, and lamentations on the calamities of the time." His *Muse chrétienne* thus contains several invectives addressed to "Catholic armies, priests and powerful men" who, he argues, "practiced abhorrence above and beyond all that can be found in the Old Testament."[28] Goulart, a core member of this group, did not himself recoil from a concrete and direct usage of the psalms to appeal for divine vengeance against his adversaries. The journal that he kept in 1590, when Geneva was at war with the Duke of Savoy and feared daily for its survival, is riven with such appeals.[29] The work of Agrippa

24. Bordier, *Le chansonnier huguenot du XVIe siècle*, 2:287–95; Jeanneret, *Poésie et tradition biblique*, 428–31; Pineaux, "Poésies protestantes," 798–800. See also Maisonfleur, *Cantiques*.
25. Malescot, *Cantiques ou chansons spirituelles*, 17, 25.
26. Gœury, "Les pasteurs poètes"; Aubert-Gillet, "Un école poétique autour de Simon Goulart."
27. See, e.g., Perrot, *Perles d'eslite*; and Alizet, *La Calliope chrestienne*.
28. Jeanneret, "Pierre Poupo," 23; Barbier-Mueller, "Trois poètes réformés à Genève."
29. Goulart, "Journal de la guerre faite autour," 56, 68, 93.

d'Aubigné can be considered part of this school, including his *Tragiques*, which contains a number of curses.[30] His *Petites oeuvres meslees* also offers paraphrases of psalms that highlight their imprecatory function.[31]

Beza's commentaries on the psalms, however, offer the best means to gauge the differences between the way that imprecation was understood during the last third of the sixteenth century and the approach adopted by Calvin several decades earlier. In his 1581 *Pseaumes de David et les cantiques de la Bible, avec les argumens et la paraphrase*, Beza examines the question of cursing by commenting on Psalm 109. Like Calvin, Beza formulates rules for its usage, but his consideration of the proper limits on imprecatory prayer is quickly summarized: he is content to eliminate only imprecatory prayer that arises from "a spirit of vengeance or false zeal" or is launched "recklessly." From the outset, he clearly expresses the principle that "no one is prohibited from using them altogether, as long as one pays attention to certain points."[32] In Calvin's writings, the possibility of pronouncing imprecatory prayers is only half acknowledged; in contrast, for Beza such ambiguity is abandoned. Furthermore, Beza dedicates most of his commentary not to delineating the rules that constrained imprecatory prayer but to articulating a theological, biblical, and historical justification for its practice. Commenting upon the Lord's Prayer, for example, he closely associates prayer in favor of divine "rule" with prayer against those who place obstacles its path. These two elements constitute, to his mind, two aspects of the same discourse: "Jesus Christ teaches us to pray so that the Kingdom of God comes, which can only be accomplished if we pray at the same time that the reign of the Antichrist and all his supporters, who are determined enemies of the true Church, are destroyed; in so doing, he shows us that one ought to pray against the conspiratorial enemies of the church." Beza continues by listing an inventory of biblical passages in which imprecatory prayer is found, thus placing at his readers' disposal an arsenal of scriptural arguments authorizing its use. Finally, by demonstrating the efficacy of early Christian cursing, Beza provides an additional proof of its legitimacy and divine approbation.[33]

It was during the final years of the Wars of Religion that French-speaking members of the Reformed faith were most willing to practice imprecatory prayer and quick to dismiss any hesitations about it. At this time the Francophone faithful intensely self-identified with Old Testament figures engaged in battling their enemies; King David and the psalms were their principal source of

30. D'Aubigné, *Les tragiques*, 272, 305, 308–9.
31. D'Aubigné, *Oeuvres complètes*, 353.
32. Beza, *Les pseaumes de David et les cantiques de la Bible*, 558–59.
33. Ibid.

inspiration.[34] Imprecation thus represented the world as divided between the "true" faithful and the church's enemies. The hyperbolic formula of imprecatory prayer emphasized the close ties that linked the divine to the church and gave rise to the expectation that Providence would intervene violently to ensure victory for his church. Such appeals to Providence were not exclusively the provenance of Protestants: particularly after the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacres, Catholic prayers also asked God to "exterminate all evil people" or to ensure that the "race of heretics" was "entirely annihilated, consumed, and ostracized."[35]

Imprecation and an atmosphere of confessional conflict were still present in the spiritual literature of the first decades of the seventeenth century. The Lorraine poet François de L'Ancluse adds, for example, a "Hymn to Console the Faithful against the Enemies of God's Truth" in his 1619 edition of the *Antithèse de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ et du pape de Rome*.[36] Analogously, the 1622 edition of Antoine de la Roche Chandieu's *Complainte chrestienne* includes a hymn composed in 1572 by Maisonfleur and a "public prayer" in which the faithful express their hope that God rush to the defense of his people against his enemies and "avenge the violence that they wish to inflict upon us."[37] After the military defeat at La Rochelle, which ended Protestant military power in France (1628), and the disappearance of Agrippa d'Aubigné (1630), which extinguished the hope of establishing a Protestant literary academy,[38] such imprecatory formulas gradually faded away in French Reformed spiritual works.

Debate about imprecatory prayer resurfaced at the end of the seventeenth century, just after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), when political and religious conflict revived temptations to curse one's enemies. At this time real tensions existed between two strains of Protestant thought: on the one hand, the idea of forming an alliance among powerful Protestants against Louis XIV, sustained by a new Protestant irenicism; on the other hand, a collective discourse initiated by a number of Protestant intellectuals advocating pan-Christian tolerance based on making clear distinctions between ecclesiastical and civil structures.[39] The manner in which the question of imprecation was discussed shows that, while some still favored appropriating biblical curses to respond to the renewal of confessional tensions following the Revocation, most

34. Parker, "French Calvinists as the Children of Israel."

35. Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu*, 124, 133; Pallier, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Paris*, nos. 434, 605, 629, 630.

36. L'Ancluse, *Antithèse de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ et du pape de Rome*, 1–4.

37. *Complainte chrestienne*; Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry, and Protest*, 212–18.

38. Gœury, "Les pasteurs poètes," 139.

39. Boles, *Huguenots*; Pitassi, "'Nonobstant ces petites differences'"; Grosse, "Tolérance ou coexistence?"

ecclesiastical authorities and most of the Reformed educated elite rejected imprecation as incompatible with a spirit of Christian charity.

Pierre Jurieu discovered this to his dismay after getting involved in a bitter debate. Responding to a sermon by a Rotterdam pastor, Jacques Basnage, who taught "that it is never permitted to hate someone under any pretext whatsoever," Jurieu gave two sermons in which he claimed that "hate is permitted against the enemies of God." In the process, he provoked a public controversy on subject that, while lasting only a short time, was no less virulent and significant.[40] Its tone was established by Pierre Bayle, who published a brief pamphlet whose title challenged the orthodoxy of Jurieu's position: *Nouvelle heresie dans la morale, touchant la haine du prochain*.[41] When Jurieu responded with his *Reflexions sur un libelle (s.l.n.d)*, the brother of Jacques Basnage, Henri Basnage, intervened in the debate with his own more humorous response: *Considerations sur deux sermons de Mr. Jurieu, touchant l'amour du prochain: où l'on traite incidemment cette question curieuse: s'il faut hair Mr. Jurieu*. Tellingly, this literary battle concluded with the defeat of Jurieu, who was forced to renounce his two sermons.

More revealing still were the arguments that these adversaries exchanged. Identifying with the mental framework of the Reformed faithful during the Wars of Religion, who associated their situation with that of the Jews of the Old Testament, Jurieu identified his cause with that of God, insisting that "his enemies were the enemies of God."[42] His opponents expressed an ideological perspective that was becoming dominant by the end of the seventeenth century. Arguing clearly and concisely, Bayle insists that "all the law and the gospels are reducible to two ideas: the love of God and the love of one's neighbor." Hate has no place in this interpretation of Christian morality. Furthermore, the definition of neighbor cannot be restricted or confessionalized: "By one's 'neighbor' one does not simply refer to those who are of the same religion as us, but all men in general." Thus, even though some points of Christian doctrine can be disputed, questioning that charity should extend to all humanity is, for Bayle, "a mortal attack against everything that remained healthy and whole among all those who are called Christians."[43]

This heated debate reflects several key elements that became crucial to the renewal of Reformed identity at the end of the seventeenth century. The

40. Basnage, *Corrispondenza da Rotterdam*, 136 (Apr. 12, 1694). I wish to thank Maria-Cristina Pitassi, who helped me find this letter, which she analyzes in her *Inventaire critique de la correspondance de Jean-Alphonse Turrettini*, 1:569–70.

41. Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses*, 794–96, pamphlet dated Mar. 2, 1694.

42. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1:lxxii.

43. Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses*, 794–96.

scriptural center of gravity of Reformed culture began to move from the Old Testament, so essential to the piety of sixteenth-century Reformed communities, to the New Testament. In this same shift, the Reformed faith increasingly defined itself as a peaceful and rational Christian tradition, defending an evangelical morality in which charity was the founding principle. Reformed elites gradually dismissed certain theological questions as "obscure"; like-minded theologians sought to avoid engaging in controversy and were less interested in delimiting the bounds of confessional orthodoxy.[44] In this context, even Bayle's title signals that the notion of heresy was less a theological affirmation than a moral imperative. Reformed intellectual circles reconstructed a collective consciousness around the notion of belonging to a Republic of Letters capable of transcending confessional barriers. Finally, for these same elites, the ideal of tolerance, of which Bayle was one of the most ardent defenders, was becoming a central part of their Protestant identity. For these irenic Christians, the "fundamental articles" of the faith were reduced to a handful of principles, more ethical than theological, to which all Christians ought to be able to agree. In this context, imprecations and curses seemed like relics of an ancient Hebrew past.

Imbued with this new sensibility, ecclesiastical authorities during this period became increasingly reticent about singing imprecatory psalms. The "Notice to the reader" that opened the revised version of the psalter prepared by Valentin Conrart, finished by the company of pastors of Geneva, and published in 1695 reveals this new orientation clearly.[45] Although the pastors and professors of theology who revised this text admitted that in the psalms there are "wishes, similar to curses on the part of the author against his enemies," they did so to clearly underline that these formulas were the provenance of the Old Testament period. The new edition of the text underscored, in other words, these practices belonged to a bygone era.[46]

Beginning in 1695, authorities vacillated between a strategy of offering instructions and warnings about how to use the psalms containing curses and one in which such psalms were purely and simply eliminated. After repeated attempts, Genevan ministers ended by removing "all psalms of cursing" from printed lists of psalms to be sung during services.[47] Many psalters revised and published in the eighteenth century bore preambles that discuss this question at length. In the preface of his *Livre des psaumes traduit en François sur l'original hébreu*, Théodore Crinsoz discussed for several pages whether imprecatory

44. Pitassi, *L'orthodoxie aux Lumières*.
45. Grosse, "La Réforme face à ses traditions."
46. *Les Psaumes de David […] retouchez par Monsieur Conrart*, fols. q4r–q5r.
47. Archives d'Etat de Genève, Cp. Past. R. 19, p. 376, Oct. 27, 1709.

psalms are "contrary to the spirit of charity and of kindness that should fill inspired men." He developed his argument by historicizing its practice, claiming that it reflected the morality and customs characteristic of Jewish culture in the Old Testament. This reasoning led him to take a position firmly in favor of abolishing imprecation: "Those who have the good fortune to live under the Gospel should never pronounce such things. We are no longer under the Law of Moses that authorized them, but under Jesus Christ, who forbids expressly them." As a result, he asked himself "whether it would be best to remove them entirely from editions that are translated in modern languages for the public and particular use of the faithful." His concern, typical of scholarly prejudice of his day, was that the common people might misuse these tests.[48] A similar reasoning exists in the introductory sections of a psalter published in 1768 that was destined for the use of members of the Reformed faith in France.[49]

After allowing themselves to be tempted into invoking imprecatory psalms during the Wars of Religion and the apex of the confessionalization process, Francophones of the Reformed faith progressively broke with this practice during the eighteenth century. The last bastion for the usage of imprecatory prayer, where it was tolerated the longest, was in the Huguenot churches in Holland. In 1713 Leonard Baulacre described to Jean-Alphonse Turrettini a spiritual environment that he considered outdated when he reported on a service he attended in Amsterdam where the preaching focused on predestination and the congregation was "asked to sing psalm 109," the same psalm that even Beza noted, when justifying imprecatory prayer, was "full of the most horrible curses."[50] Although a professor of Oriental languages in Rotterdam advocated in a 1746 memoir the "suppressing of imprecatory psalms," a version of the psalter published in Amsterdam in 1754 highlights in the index a section titled "Prophetic imprecations against the enemies and persecutors of the church."[51] In a version of the psalter published only two years later, however, the solution proposed by the professor from Rotterdam, to include imprecatory prayers in the future tense to give them prophetic emphasis, was finally adopted in that city.[52]

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48. Crinsoz, *Le livre des psaumes*, iv–vii.

49. *Les Pseaumes de David, mis en vers françois*.

50. *Lettres inédites adressées de 1686 à 1737 à J.-A. Turrettini*, 1:169–70; Pitassi, *Inventaire critique*, 2:786–87 (no. 2440).

51. Bovet, *Histoire du psautier*, 187; *Les Pseaumes de David mis en vers françois, revus et approuvés par le Synode Walon*, 463.

52. Bovet, *Histoire du psautier*, 187.

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