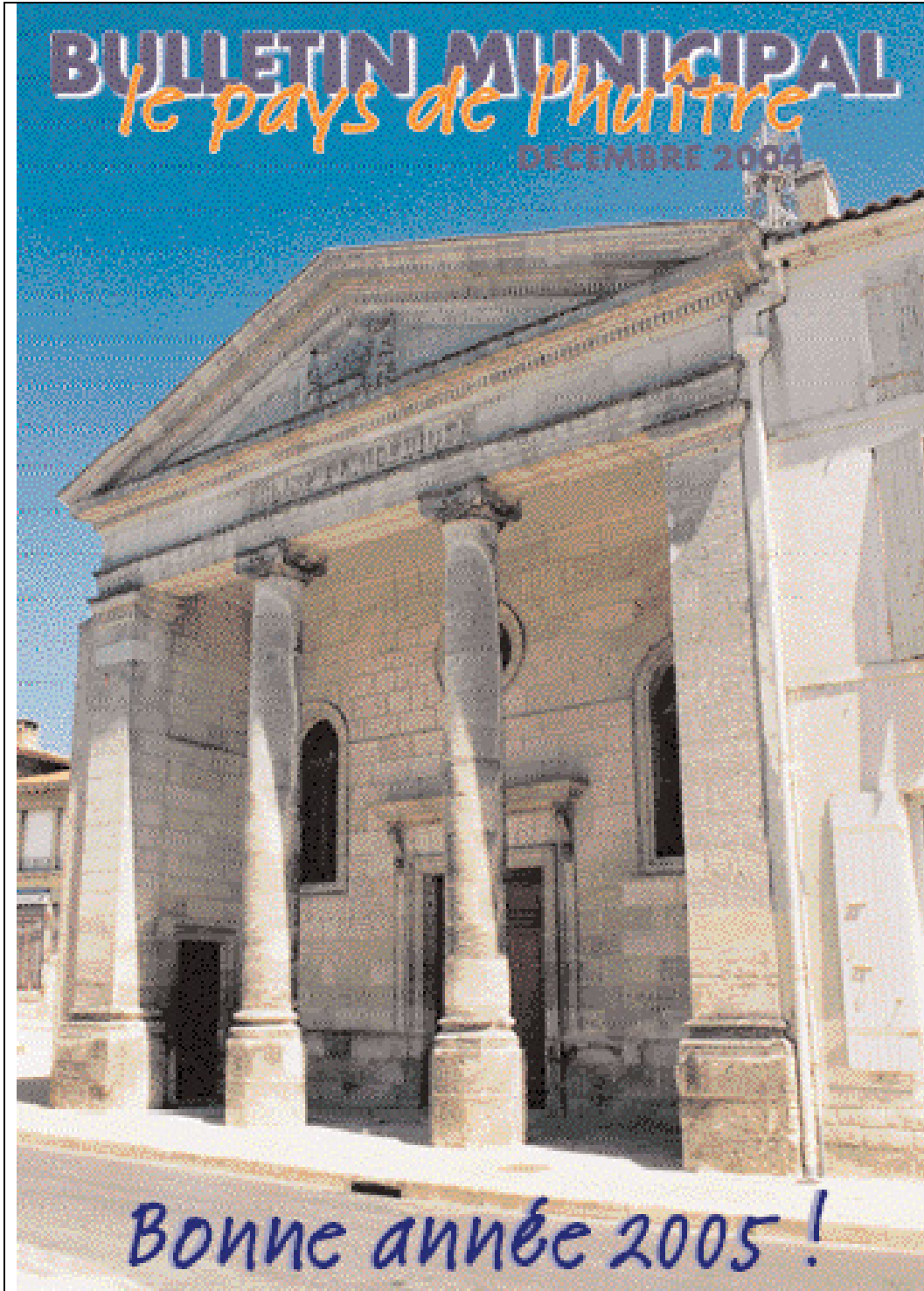


The Temple of Marennes, France



The Protestant temple was the object, in 2004 of a transfer of property (on a purely free basis) of the local Protestant Church to the Commune of MARENNES. The Religious organization of the Isles of Saintonge - local Church of the Reformed Church of France - became effective some places in accordance with the law of 1905. This legal modification concretizes alignment on the traditional solution concerning the places of worship existing before with the law of 1905. The local Protestant community is grateful to the municipality to have accepted this transfer which implies the responsibility of ensure the huge maintenance of this monument. At this occasion, we propose to you a page of history of local Protestantism.

Credits: Pictures and Text from the Marennes, France Municipal Website at: <http://marennes.fr/fr/bulletin.php> Poor translation by John Fisher

It is in 1544 that one starts to intend to speak in the area about monk-preachers who apply to the population maintaining it in the Lutheran heresy with St Etienne of Arvert, but also in Saint-Just, Saintes and Oléron.



Since 1543, The University of Paris imposed to the monks of all kinds, a confession of faith strictly orthodox endeavoring to stop the reformation movement by dispersing the small number of priests and monks allured by the new ideas. Those which do not want to sign these articles of faith are driven out of their place of ministry. The most determined of these headed back to these places thinking of finding freedom to express their reformist ideas. Five of them are settled thus in Saintonge: Philippe Barat in Saint-Just, close to Marennes, brother Nicole Courcel in Arvert, brother Hubert Robin in St-Denis d' Oléron, Philibert Hamelin in Saintes and brother Rene Macé in Gémozac.

Preserving their clerical habits to draw aside the suspicions of the local authorities, they generally preach in the churches. During the week they teach class with the children and introduce into the families the

very recent translation in French of the New Testament thus supporting the diffusion of "subversion" near the classes the most knowledgeable. Appreciated and respected of all they embody, the simplicity and the ideal evangelic from which the established clergy strongly move away.

At that time, the bishop of Saintes Tristan de Bizet and its vicar (and nephew assassinated later by a member of a league) seem to have protected, if not encouraged, these Lutherans pioneers the more so as these monk-preachers by no means intended to found a new Church. But their popular success worries sufficiently the capacity so that it is concerned to conceal these troublemakers.



One of them will succeed in fleeing and disappearing while two others, persistent in their conviction, will be executed in 1546.

As for Philibert Hamelin, he takes refuge in Geneva, there becomes a printer, and is formed with the pastoral ministry, with a hundred others that Calvin intends to deal with the reform of the Church in France. In two years Philibert Hamelin organizes the communities of Arvert, of Marennes and of Saintes also preaching in Oléron La local request and the success of his mission are such as, very quickly, he asks that Geneva send reinforcement to him. But in 1556, that is to say ten years after his first incarceration, he is stopped by the royal capacity and accused to have baptized a child in the church of Arvert (The Bishop of Saintes will not be able to tolerate this act and will move in person to rebaptise the child). Judged and condemned, Hamelin will be executed on April 12, 1557.

But some others are taking the change, Charles Léopard in Arvert in 1559, Charles of the Fountain with Marennes in 1558.

Unfortunately, once more, during 1559 and 1560, the repression obliges La Fountain and Leopard to enter in clandestinity and to traverse the roads of the islands to escape arrest.

La Fountain will benefit from it to branch out more amply on Oléron and St Sornin, Léopard will preach in Mornac and will create the Church of Saujon. Under the

regency of Catherine de Médicis two years of calm (1561-1562) will make possible the final establishment of the reformed Church.



The Reformed will very quickly become the economic authorities of the cities and the villages. In 1544, no presence of the Reform is attested in the area, in 1576, about the three quarters of the population is converted.

But at the national level, the action of the Guises which organized the massacre of Wassy, in 1562, rings the knell, if not of a possible reconciliation, of less then a cordial harmony between Catholics and Protestants who initiated it.

A sad series of persecutions, combat and reciprocal atrocities followed. Finally, by observing more closely the continuation of these events - qualified by the historians of the 19th century - wars of religion, theology has a good side. Many convinced Catholics are outraged at the fate reserved to the Protestants (as much later some Protestants will carry to the persecuted priests at the time of terror). They know the drifts of the clergy and reject them.

In fact they are more defenses of material interests and to be able that theological quarrels which could not be regulated by violence.

The central message of the Reformers - the justification by the faith alone in Jesus-Christ and not by works - is heard as liberator, with the strong direction of the term, by a distressed society, tormented by the idea of eternal damnation and of works to escape from it. The announcement to the populations, even illiterate and miserable, that their safety is the business of the love and from the grace of God, in a word which it is free, release them from a terrible yoke. The appearance of the Reform to the country of the Isles of Saintonge caused there very quickly a moralization of manners and the development of the instruction. Since all must be able to reach the Writings and that the invention of printing works allows the diffusion of the Bible. The schools multiply, those of Marenes will be most significant.

In the Isles of Saintonge, Oléron, strategic points in front of La Rochelle, will be the issue of violent battles; Marenes and the peninsula of Arvert will be saved. The Edict of Nantes will stabilize this situation; until the said Edict of tolerance in 1787 the fate of Saintongeais

Protestantism is related to that of La Rochelle, one of most significant places safety that the Edict of 1598 grants to the Protestants. Until 1628, Protestantism will know thirty years of relatively serene blooming in the absence of numerical growth, since the Edict prohibited to the Protestants any proselytism. But the situation is degraded gradually to lead in 1685 to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. True economic catastrophe for the area (and the kingdom). The most prosperous Protestants and the more enterprising leave the kingdom in spite of prohibitions. They carry with them, the capital and the know-how (in particular in the textile and the trade).

In our region open on the sea, land of refuge in times of persecution and in contact with the Protestant countries (in particular Dutch boats coming to seek salt at Brouage) the successes of the Reform are striking down. The massive subscription of a population to strong particularism, often miserable subscription and thus thirsty of liberation and purity, and that of a local minor nobility leads quickly to the organization of communities structured and acting in the society.

At the end of XVIIIth century, the royal capacity will be disputed, the Protestants of the area will

take an active share in the Revolution. Initially, the declaration of the rights of man specifies that no one cannot be worried for its opinions, were religious, but then all the religions are persecuted and it will be necessary to await the first empire and the legal settlement so that the true freedom of conscience is finally recognized and that the non-Catholic worships (Protestant and Israelite) acquire a legal recognition, some Protestant temples start to be constructed. At Marennnes, the old temple, then located in the current street Dubois-Meynardie, had been destroyed at the time of the revocation. In the middle of XIXth century the reformed community acquires of the old chapel of the convent of the Jesuits (on the current street of the Republic). That is demolished in 1839 and is replaced by a building equipped with a neo-classic frontage with a triangular pediment on which figure an open bible surrounded by draperies. Dedicated in 1859, this temple had been drawn by architect JOSSIER author also of those of Etaules, of St Sulpice de Royan and from Chaillevette.(')

Thanks to Philippe Caviglioli for his feedback of this article.

1~See the heritage of the communes of Charent-Maritime Ed. Flohic 2002 P398

The Reformed Church of Isles of Saintonge extends on the cantons from Marennnes, Oléron and La Tremblade, plus the communes of Mornac and of l'Eguille.

Those associated with the Reformed Church of the Consistory of Charente Maritime (Isle of Re, La Rochelle, Rochefort, Saint Jean d' Angély, Saintes, Southern Saintonge, Saintonge-Océan and Royan).

The government of the Reformed Church of France is of presbytérien synod: Each local Church is constituted in Religious Association, directed by the Presbytéral Council elected by the faithful ones and to which participe(nt) pastors. These Councils elect delegates with the Regional Synod which is held once in November per annum. The members of the Regional Synod elect in their turn the Regional Council. Moreover they elect representatives with the National Synod which meets each year in the month of May. The National Synod elects in its center the National Council currently chaired by Pasteur Marcel Manoël. The National Synod elects representatives with the Protestant Federation of France. The synods include an equal number pastors and the laity.

Marennnes Postcards

