Upon Stony Places:

Persecution and the First Reformed Confession of the Americas

Lucas Donato

September 10, 2025

Introduction

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 22.4% of the Brazilian population in 2010 self-identified as evangelical, which represents a significant increase from the 15.5% of the previous survey, only ten years prior to that.[1] More recent data from other sources estimate an evangelical population as great as 31% of the total Brazilian population.[2] However, such a substantial evangelical presence in Brazil developed fairly recently, as in the national census of 1940, protestants were found to represent but 2.61% of that country's population.[3]

During the Portuguese colonial regime, Protestantism was strongly repressed in Brazilian grounds, until at least the 19th century.[4] In fact, the first Protestant mission to Brazil could not even be established in lands controlled by Portugal, but in the short-lived Antarctic France, or France Antarctique (1555–1560): a colony in the southeast coast, where is now located the city of Rio de Janeiro.[5]

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1. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Atlas do Censo Demográfico 2010* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: IBGE, 2013), 143.

2. Anna Virginia Balloussier, "Cara típica do evangélico brasileiro é feminina e negra, aponta Datafolha," *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 13, 2020, https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/01/cara-tipica-do-evangelico-brasileiro-e-feminina-e-negra-aponta-datafolha.shtml.

3. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Recenseamento Geral do Brasil (1.º de Setembro de 1940): Série Nacional*, vol. 2, *Censo Demográfico: População e Habitação* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: IBGE, 1950), 1.

4. For a presentation of a few inquisitorial trials in colonial Brazil for the crime of "Lutheranism," see, e.g., Rossana Britto and Fábio Py Murta de Almeida, "Lutheranism and Inquisition in Colonial Brazil (16th Century)," *Revista Pistis & Praxis: Teologia e Pastoral* 6, no. 3 (September–December 2014): 1077–1094.

5. Alderi S. Matos, "The Guanabara Confession of Faith," *Unio cum Christo* 1, no. 1–2 (Fall 2015): 133.

The lead missionaries to this colony were two Genevan pastors which often corresponded more or less directly with John Calvin. A few of these documents were preserved and are now valuable research assets.[6] Calvin and his church at Geneva were supportive of and optimistic about this church-expansion project, which was in fact the first overseas Calvinist mission.[7] Another preserved document was the Guanabara Confession of 1558 — the first Reformed confession ever composed in the New World —, authored by four laymen residents of the colony as an apology for their Reformed faith, which stands as their testimony and legacy to the following ages of missionaries to Brazil. However, with great persecution coming from within and from without, the mission came to an abrupt end, only leaving behind its history, confession, and the lives of martyrs.

The history of the mission to the Antarctic France illustrates how negatively tribulation and persecution affected a gospel seed fallen upon stony places,[8] and how God does not depend on human will or efforts, but only on his own mercy.[9] This research will demonstrate that despite the Genevan missionary zeal, the first mission to the Americas could not withstand the increasing French persecution, so that the process of reformation in Brazil had to be delayed by about one more century.

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6. Francisco (Frans) Leonard Schalkwijk, "O Brasil na correspondência de Calvino," in *Calvino e a influência de seu pensamento*, ed. Davi Charles Gomes and Augusto Nicodemus Gomes Lopes (São Paulo, Brazil: Mackenzie, 2012), 75, 77.

7. Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 4, 5.

8. Matt. 13:1–23 KJV.

9. Rom. 9:16 KJV.

A Haven From Persecution

Nicholas Durand de Villegaignon (1510–1571), a distinguished Knight of Malta, notable for his military achievements across Europe, after having had some discontentments in both France and England, and hearing of the beauties of the New World, purposed to lead a colonial expedition to the so-called "land of Brazil."[10] Being a deeply religious man and seemingly sympathetic toward the doctrines of the Reformation, Villegaignon advertised his enterprise as the hope of creating a haven for those desiring to serve God with freedom and purity of conscience, who were suffering sore persecution under King Henry II of France as well as in other parts of Europe.[11] Such a godly project gained Admiral Gaspard de Coligny's attention — himself a leading Huguenot —, who gladly intervened on behalf of the explorer, convincing the king that a colony in South America would be of much economic advantage, especially through the extraction of brazilwood. Villegaignon was then granted two ships, well equipped and armed, plus ten thousand francs for his journey.[12]

On November 10, 1555, the French vessels reached the Brazilian coast, in the Guanabara Bay, a territory formerly under Portuguese control but loosely protected. The Antarctic France was successfully established by means of an alliance with the native people Tumpinambá against the Portuguese and the building of Fort Coligny. However, after facing certain difficulties with

10. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 3, 4.

11. Marc Lescarbot, *History of New France*, vol. 2 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1907), 148.

12. *Ibid*., 149.

his initial company and even an attempt of a conspiracy,[13] Villegaignon desired to elevate the moral and religious ethos of the colony, and sent back to France, requesting that ministers would be sent from the Church of Geneva, as well as other persons instructed in the Christian religion.[14]

The council at Geneva received this request with enthusiasm and evangelistic zeal, being desirous to extend their church to such distant lands and to proclaim the gospel to a people without God. Indeed, from his interactions with the natives later on, Jean de Léry recounts that he found no worship of a supreme being such as God among the Tupinambás, being the fear of thunder their closest notion to that of a deity.[15] André Thevet gives a similar account, having found, despite some religious division among the indigenous peoples that he had interacted with, the fear of "a greate Lorde, whom they name in their language Toupan, the which they say is aboue, and maketh it rayne and thunder, but they haue not the meane to praye nor to honor him at one tyme of other, neither yet no place appointed."[16]

Due to unattractive reports from former travelers, recruiting volunteers for such an enterprise became a difficult task. Stories involving severe climate, unfamiliar food, and the cannibal rites of the native tribes were popular in Europe at the time, and deterred many from

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13. As recorded, for example, in his letter to John Calvin, number 2612 in Eduardus Cunitz and Eduardus Reuss, eds., *Thesaurus epistolicus Calvinianus: Sive collectio amplissima epistolarum tam ab Io. Calvino quam ad eum scriptarum quas maxima ex parte e codicibus manuscriptis erutas*, vol. 7, in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia: Ad fidem editionum principum et authenticarum ex parte etiam codicum manu scriptorum*, vol. 16, eds. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1877), 437–440.

14. Lescarbot, *History of New France*, vol. 2, 157.

15. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 134, 135.

16. André Thevet, *The new found vvorlde, or Antarctike wherin is contained wo[n]derful and strange things, as well of humaine creatures, as beastes, fishes, foules, and serpents, trées, plants, mines of golde and siluer: Garnished with many learned aucthorities, trauailed and written in the French tong, by that excellent learned man, master Andrevve Theuet* (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1568), 42, 43.

enlisting for the adventure.[17] However, Geneva was able to send two ministers — Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier — among twelve other believing men of various crafts[18] to join the three French ships, which carried a total of about 300 persons from the port of Honfleur in Normandy to the colony on November 19, 1556.

Jean de Léry, the cronist of the voyage, records the events of the trip in detail, featuring vivid descriptions of the terrible winds and tempests they had to face, the fish and other sea creatures they saw, the islands they approached, and their interactions with rival Portuguese and Spanish vessels. Léry's account also has a certain devotional tone, featuring several references to the sacred Scriptures and judging events in the light of divine ethics and providence.[19]

Through the diverse perils and difficulties of their journey across the Atlantic, the new company reached the Brazilian coast on March 7, 1557, and was warmly received by Villegaignon. The Genevan party soon stated their purpose to establish a Reformed church in the land, in conformity with the request letter they had received. Léry records Villegaignon's greetings to the newcomers:

> "As for me," he said, "I have long desired this, with all my heart, . . . because I want our Church to be renowned as the best reformed of all, from now on I intend that all vices be repressed, that sumptuousness of apparel be reformed, and, in short, that everything that could prevent us from serving God be removed from our midst." Then, raising his eyes to heaven and clasping his hands, he said, "Lord God, I thank thee for having sent what I have so ardently prayed for." Then, addressing our company again, "My children (for I wish to be your father), just as Jesus Christ when He was in this world did nothing for himself, but rather did everything for us, so too. . . everything that I mean to do here is

17. G. Baez-Camargo, "The Earliest Protestant Missionary Venture in Latin America," *Church History* 21, no. 2 (June 1952): 136.

18. Léry lists ". . . Du Pont, Richier, and Chartier: Pierre Bourdon, Matthieu Verneuil, Jean du Bordel, André La Fon, Nicolas Denis, Jean Gardien, Martin David, Nicolas Raviquet, Nicolas Carmeau, Jacques Rousseau, and I, Jean de Léry, . . ." in his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 6.

19. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 7–32.

> for you, and for all those who come here with the same purpose as yours. For I intend to make here a refuge for the poor faithful who are persecuted in France, in Spain, and elsewhere across the sea, so that, fearing neither king, nor emperor, nor any other potentates, they can serve God purely according to his will."[20]

Shortly after their arrival, Villegaignon gathered all the people of the island in a little room for what is acknowledged to be the first evangelical service to have ever been celebrated in Brazilian lands, led by Pierre Richier. After the words of invocation, the assembly sang the words of the Fifth Psalm. The minister then proceeded to the preaching of a sermon on a portion of Psalm 27. It is reported that Villegaignon amazed all present with some of his external manifestations, such as "incessantly clasping his hands, raising his eyes to the heavens, [and] heaving great sighs."[21] After closing in prayer, the assembly was dismissed, and a welcome dinner served to the newcomers.

In their letter to Calvin, Richier and Chartier have also given an optimistic account of their reception by Villegaignon, calling him "both a father and a brother, who nourishes and cherishes us,"[22] and greatly commending his faithfulness in presiding both his household and the colony. The ministers — comparing him to such figures as Priscilla and Aquila, Nymphas, and King Solomon — praised him for his commitment to the pure Biblical religion, even to the point of leaving aside what they termed "the dogmas of the ancient doctors," even though he esteemed them greatly.[23]

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20. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 33, 34.

21. *Ibid*., 34.

22. Cunitz and Reuss, eds., *Thesaurus epistolicus Calvinianus*, vol. 7, 442.

23. "Delectatur enim verbo Dei, cui ne doctorum quidem antiquorum dogmata, quamvis multis sacra videntur, praeferre instituit. Carnis certe iudicium hoc vix admittit, quandoquidem antiquitas apud eum multum potest: eo usque tamen pervenit ut animum suum sancto puroque Dei verbo regi sinat." (*Ibid.*)

Villegaignon is reported to have often manifested deep admiration for John Calvin, his former colleague at Sorbonne. It is reported that he often called Calvin "one of the most learned personages who has lived since the apostles."[24] In his letter to the Reformer, Villegaignon expressed his satisfaction for the arrival of the Genevan ministers, as he had been performing both civil and religious functions thus far, and feared — in his own words — having the same fate as King Uzziah.[25] He tells in his letter that he was compelled to get involved in religious matters for the sake of his workers, although this need had been met with the arrival of the two ministers, on account of which he was relieved.[26]

> I will take the counsel that you have given me in your letters, and endeavor with all my power not to stray from it in the least. For indeed, I am fully persuaded that there can be none holier, truer, or more entire. Therefore we have also had your letters read in the assembly of our council, and afterward registered, so that if we should chance to wander from the straight and narrow path, we may be recalled and corrected by the reading of them.[27]

Léry recounts that, the first week after their arrival, Villegaignon established services every evening after the day's work and twice on the Lord's day, always featuring an hour-long sermon. He also committed to the celebration of the sacraments according to the Word of God — free of human inventions — and to a system of church discipline.[28]

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24. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 41.

25. 2 Chron. 26:16–21 KJV.

26. Cunitz and Reuss, eds., *Thesaurus epistolicus Calvinianus*, vol. 7, 437.

27. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 41, 42. Also found in Cunitz and Reuss, eds., *Thesaurus epistolicus Calvinianus*, vol. 7, 440: ". . . Hoc enim certe nec sanctius nec rectius nec sanius ullum esse persuasum habeo. . . ."

28. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 35.

And so it was that on March 21, 1557, the Lord's Supper was first celebrated in the colony. Prior to the sacrament — all communicants having been catechized and prepared —, some professed faith, including Villegaignon and his friend Jean Cointat — another doctor from Sorbonne —, who abjured Papism in favor of the Reformed doctrine. Then, after having dedicated long public prayers, Villegaignon was the first to approach the table. In his prayers, he acknowledged the sinfulness of his own nature, the inadequacy of his efforts, and the sole merits and necessity for the mediation of Christ. He furthermore prayed for the establishment and advancement of their newborn Church, and for protection particularly against the attacks of Satan, heretics, and the people of the land. In his account, Léry alleges to have quoted Villegaignon's prayers "word by word, without changing a single letter,"[29] as in the excerpt below.

> . . . In this faith then, My God, I render unto Thee thanks with all my heart, that it hath pleased Thee to call me away from the affairs of this world, amidst which I lived by the appetite of ambition, and by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit to put me in a land where I can freely serve Thee with all my strength for the increase of Thy Holy Kingdom, and in so doing to prepare a place and a peaceful dwelling for those who are being forbidden to invoke Thy Name in public, where they can sanctify Thee and adore Thee in spirit and in truth, and recognize Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ as our only mediator, our way and our life, and the sole merit of our salvation. . . . may it please Thee too, Our Lord and Father, to extend Thy benediction to this place Coligny, and to this land of Antarctic France, to be an impregnable retreat for those who in good faith and without hypocrisy seek refuge there, . . . and where we may, without disturbance from heretics, invoke Thee in truth. . . .[30]

Shortly after, however, controversies about the nature and administration of the sacrament arose, and Villegaignon's posture toward the Genevan ministers and the Reformed faith began to suffer shift drastically.

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29. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 36.

30. *Ibid*., 37.

Without Were Fightings, Within Were Fears

By influence of Jean Cointat, Villegaignon began to question the Genevan view of the sacraments, particularly concerning their lack of observance of customs such as mixing water to the wine, after the teaching of some Church Fathers, and wearing of priestly robes when distributing the elements.[31] He also seemed confused about the nature of Christ's presence in the elements, as Léry recounts that both Villegaignon and Cointat had denied the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran consubstantiation, yet still held to some manner of physical presence. Later, they also desired to add salt and oil to the water of baptism, resorting again to Church tradition.

Villegaignon's fear of becoming one like King Uzziah had proved to be insincere, as he actually desired to have a great measure of control over religious doctrine and practice in the colony. Therefore, after much controversy, on June 4, 1557, Villegaignon had Chartier return to France with the alleged intent that the minister would bring them answers back from the church authorities on the sacramental questions posed.[32] As Richier still resisted and preached against their traditional practices, Villegaignon reduced frequency and duration of worship services, and appointed Cointat to teach public lessons on theology in the colony. He also switched opinions on Calvin and his teaching, calling the Reformer "a wicked heretic who had strayed from the faith."[33]

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31. James I. Good, "Calvin and the New World," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 5, no. 4 (December 1909): 183.

32. Lescarbot, *History of New France*, vol. 2, 182.

33. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 45.

Furthermore, Léry suggests that Villegaignon may have received correspondence from the Cardinal of Lorraine reproving him harshly for having abandoned the Roman religion,[34] which may have contributed for his confusing posture change toward the Reformation. At that point, would he ban the Genevans altogether, he could lose the Admiral's support; would King Henry II know of his disloyalty to Rome, he could be accused of treason. Even though the Reformed faith had grown significantly among the French nobility, insomuch that Reformed worship was public in some regions controlled by Protestant princes, the profession of any religion other than Romanism was still punishable with death by the Edict of Fontainebleau (1540), further supplemented by the Edict of Châteaubriant (1551), both signed by King Henry II himself.

If Villegaignon had anticipated that persecution to the Reformed church in France would increase soon, he was proved right. Later that same year, after the third attempt, King Henry II would finally convince the parliament to request the establishment of an inquisition court after the Spanish model, whereto the Roman pontiff gladly agreed, conferring to the Cardinals of Lorraine, Bourbon, and Châtillon authority as the inquisitors-general throughout the monarchy. The same day, July 24, 1557, King Henry II signed the Edict of Compiègne, with the intent of ratifying the previous edicts and securing the proper application of the penalties prescribed therein. One month later, the defeat of St. Quentin would be attributed to the growth of Protestantism in France, and the popular animosity against the Reformed Church grow more and more.[35]

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34. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 45, 46.

35. Henry M. Baird, *History of the Rise of the Huguenots*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning of the French Reformation to the Edict of January (1562)* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker, 2007), 298–301.

Meanwhile in the colony, the Reformed party had decided to dissent from Villegaignon, and turned their eyes to the natives of the mainland, their closest neighbors the Tupinambás. Jean de Léry observed their life and customs closely, and provided a rich report in his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* on his impressions and communications with the natives, to which he dedicates a major part of this work.[36]

Léry provides truly graphic descriptions of the regions around Guanabara and Cabo Frio and the people who lived there. His description of the natives appearance would debunk various possible myths that circulated in Europe at that time, depicting them as "not taller, fatter, or smaller in stature than we Europeans are; their bodies are neither monstrous nor prodigious with respect to ours."[37] The author has also described in detail the customs of the natives, including their ornaments, body painting, family relations, war practices, and — with much shock — their practices of nakedness and anthropophagy. Furthermore, he gives a full account of the variety of wild animals, birds, fish, plants, and fruit that he saw in that region, with great precision of details and terms that may be recognized even in current usage.

Concerning the natives' religion, Léry reports that they had no notion of a Creator God, and consequently no practice of religious service, neither prayer, nor holy days whatsoever, but accounted for their time based on the observation of moon cycles. The author also lamented having found no written language among them, meaning they could have neither sacred nor secular scriptures.[38]

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36. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 51–195.

37. *Ibid*., 56.

38. *Ibid*., 134.

However, most importantly, Léry gives an account of the missionaries' ministry among the Tupinambás along the course of approximately one year. The author recounts that the natives would be astonished to hear of the idea of one God who made heaven and earth, and that the missionaries have attempted to translate the notion of God — perhaps trying to emulate Paul's Areopagus discourse[39] — into the more understandable concept of Tupan, which was associated with thunder and caused them the greatest fear.

> Adapting ourselves to their crudeness, [when they heard thunder,] we would seize the occasion to say to them that this was the very God of whom we were speaking, who to show his grandeur and power made heavens and earth tremble; their resolution and response was that since he frightened them in that way, he was good for nothing.[40]

The Tupinambás also believed in the immortality of souls, and had a demonic figure called Aygnan or Kaagerre, who would inflict incessant torment upon the unworthy souls after death. The natives experienced great fear and torment on account of this evil spirit that they would sometimes cry out in desperation, begging for help.

> They marveled to see that we were not assaulted by him. When we told them that such exemption came from the God of whom we spoke so often and who, being incomparably stronger than Aygnan, kept him from molesting or harming us, it sometimes happened that, feeling hard-pressed, they would promise to believe in Him as we did. But, as the proverb says, "When danger is past we mock the saint," so as soon as they were delivered, they no longer remembered their promises. . . . Although at times, as they saw the evil approaching or already present, they declared they would [believe and trust,] . . . afterwards it all vanished from their brain.[41]

Léry also describes the figure of the caraïbes, who were seen as some sort of itinerant prophets, who allegedly had communication privileges with the spirits, being then able to grant

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39. Acts 17:16–34 KJV.

40. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 135.

41. *Ibid*., 136, 137.

victory in combat and abundant harvest in exchange for fine food and drink — which would supposedly be consumed by their maracas, that is, their rattles. Along with Jacques Rousseau and an interpreter, the author had the chance to watch rituals performed by a group of those caraïbes. The missionaries watched their ceremonies closely and even denounced their falsehood to the native people.

> If, when we seized the occasion to point out their errors, we told them that the caraïbes, who gave it out that the maracas ate and drank, were deceiving them; and also, that it was not the caraïbes (as they falsely boasted) who caused their fruits and their big roots to grow, but rather the God in whom we believe and whom we were making known to them — well, that had about as much effect as speaking against the Pope over here, or saying in Paris that the reliquary of St. Genevieve doesn't make it rain. Therefore there caraïbe charlatans hated us no less than the false prophets of Israel (fearing to lose their fat morsels) hated Elijah, the true servant of God, who similarly revealed their abuses; . . .[42]

Moreover, Léry recounts of an occasion that they had dinner in a village nearby, and how the natives marveled at the prayers that were offered before eating, wondering about the meaning of those speeches and who was being addressed: whether one present or absent. The missionaries used the opportunity given to preach to the large audience of the village, counting on an audience that was more attentive than usual, and relying on the convenient aid of an interpreter. At the end of the speech, the audience was so moved that they committed to live by the teaching of the missionaries even to the point of giving up on the practice of anthropophagy. Notwithstanding, Léry reports that shortly after, even "before we fell asleep, we heard them singing together, that in order to avenge themselves on their enemies, they must capture and eat more of them than they ever had before."[43]

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42. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 145. Refers to events from 1 Kings 18 KJV.

43. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 146, 147.

Léry's work is groundbreaking in terms of missiology, in that he gives a first-hand written account of evangelistic interactions with tribes from colonial-era Brazil when that land was under oppression by Jesuit priests following their own syncretistic agenda. The author depicts the natives of the land as possessing actual humanity, with ability to reason, and some openness to gospel preaching. Throughout the text, he often compared the natives' shocking customs with those of the supposedly civilized Europeans, showing by this that the former's problem is the same as the latter's, that is, both groups are equally humans, and so "dead in trespasses and sins."[44]

> . . . I confess for myself that although I have always loved my country and do even now, still, seeing the little — next to none at all — of fidelity that is left here, and, what is worse, the disloyalties of people toward each other, . . . I often regret that I am not among the savages, in whom (as I have amply shown in this narrative) I have known more frankness than in many over here, who, for their condemnation, bear the title of "Christian."[45]

In fact, Léry had a more optimistic view of their mission than did Richier — who had once wrote to Geneva that they had lost any hope of gaining the natives to Christ[46] —, although even Léry could not report one single conversion from his interactions with them, which he accounts in part to the short period of time they had available to dedicate to their evangelistic efforts.

Two months after having left Fort Coligny to the mainland, arrangements were made to send the Genevans back to France on a small ship called Le Jacques, which sailed on January 4,

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44. Ephesians 2:1 KJV.

45. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 198.

46. Cunitz and Reuss, eds., *Thesaurus epistolicus Calvinianus*, vol. 7, 434.

1558. Villegaignon had actually dismissed the Protestants carrying sealed letters which gave secret instructions for their execution as traitors and heretics upon arrival, which plan failed.[47]

However, after making about twenty leagues along the coast, as the travel conditions proved unfavourable and the damage on the ship increased, five of the Calvinists volunteered to return to Fort Coligny on a boat, and so they did. Under extreme conditions — even extreme starvation —, the rest of the travelers completed their course into Nantes, where they were kindly received and treated by physicians[48] — quite a different reception than that which the five men would finally have.

A Reason of the Hope

Back to the colony, the five men were at first welcomed by Villegaignon, and promised to enjoy the same rights and liberties as their fellow workers, under the condition that they would submit to his religious regulations. But after two weeks of their return, he changed his mind about them, becoming skeptical of the reasons given for their return, and accusing them of espionage. Villegaignon was desirous to kill them, yet he had insufficient evidence for their condemnation for treason. However, as the governor of the isle, he was granted by the law of France the right to demand for the reason of their faith. Thus, he prepared them a questionnaire to which they should respond within the following twelve hours.[49]

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47. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 216, 217.

48. R. Pierce Beaver, "The Genevan Mission to Brazil," *The Reformed Journal* 17, no. 6 (July–August 1967): 20.

49. Jean Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs persecutez et mis a mort pour la verite de l'evangile, depuis le temps des apostres iuques a present (1619)*, vol. 2, bk. 7 (Toulouse: Société des Livres Religieux, 1887), 507–509.

Despite the advice of their French companions — that they should escape to the mainland and deliver themselves to the hands of the natives or of the Portuguese, and perhaps live —, convinced by their own consciences of their duty to give a reason of their hope,[50] they purposed to respond to Villegaignon's inquiries. The sincerity and bravery of their religion was expressed in the form of the Guanabara Confession of Faith (1558), drafted by Jean du Bourdel, and cosigned by Matthieu Verneuil, Pierre Bourdon, and André La Fon.[51] Historians diverge on the reasons for the lack of Jacques le Balleur's signature, who is reported to have escaped at some point to a different part of Brazil and preached among the natives of the land.[52]

The text of the Confession begins with a brief exposition of basic Christian doctrines, followed by clearly formulated responses to some of the controversies that led Villegaignon to apostatize from the Reformed faith. As so, the Guanabara Confession may be also seen as an apologetical work for the Reformed faith. According to Matos, the Confession's seventeen paragraphs deal with six different topics:

> Paragraphs one to four address the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the person of Christ with his divine and human natures. Paragraphs five to nine deal with the doctrine of the sacraments, the Lord's Supper being discussed in four articles, and baptism in one. Paragraph ten speaks about free will. Paragraphs eleven and twelve address the ministers' authority to forgive sins and lay on hands. Paragraphs thirteen to fifteen discuss divorce, the marriage of bishops, and vows of chastity. Finally, paragraphs sixteen and seventeen address the intercession of the saints and prayers for the dead.[53]

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50. 1 Pet. 3:15 KJV.

51. An English translation may be found in Jean du Bourdel, Matthieu Verneuil, Pierre Bourdon, and André la Fon, "Guanabara Confession (1558)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol. 2, *1552–1566*, ed. James T. Denison, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 117–124.

52. Matos, "The Guanabara Confession of Faith," 134.

53. *Ibid*., 135.

Although the original questionnaire proposed by Villegaignon has not been preserved, based on the Confession's content and the manner it addresses topics of dispute between Reformed and Romanist doctrine and practice, we can make inferences as for the subject of each question.

Of the essence and economy of the Holy Trinity:
(1) of the nature of God, and the duty of man;
(2) of the hypostatic union;
(3) of the Son and of the Spirit;
(4) of the authority given to the Son for the final judgment.

Of the sacraments:
(5) of the real presence in, and of kneeling for the eucharist;
(6) of the addition of water to the sacramental wine;
(7) of the consecration of the eucharistic elements;
(8) [undefined];
(9) of baptism and its traditional additions.

Of salvation:
(10) of free will.

Of a minister's authority:
(11) of forgiveness by a priest;
(12) of laying on of hands and its uses.

Of marriage and celibacy:
(13) of grounds for divorce and remarriage;
(14) of a bishop's monogamy;
(15) of vows of celibacy.

Of prayer:
(16) of praying to deceased saints;
(17) of praying for the dead.

Figure 1: inferred questionnaire.

Other than the firm foundation of Scriptures, the authors of the Confession also skillfully employed creedal form and language, demonstrating that the Reformed faith is in complete accordance to the oecumenical formulations. For instance, they appeal to the Filioque clause in paragraph one, the Symbol (Apostles' Creed) on paragraph three, and canons from the Council of Nicaea on paragraph five. Knowing also of Villegaignon's admiration for the Ancient Church writings, they cite works by Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine.

The first paragraph is introductory and fundamental for the whole document, and looks much like an adaptation of the Nicene Creed, incorporating some later trinitarian formulations such as "who is distinguished in three persons. . . of the same substance, eternal in essence, and. . . of the same will."[54] One may also notice some devotional touch expressed by the wording in some portions, e.g. "this one [Spirit] is our only comforter in affliction."[55] The second and third paragraphs still deal with questions on divinity, and succinctly reaffirm the orthodox teaching.

The fourth paragraph is noticeably more specific in its subject, dealing with the doctrine of the Christ's received authority to execute judgment. Based on the confessional text, it is possible that the Calvinists were being accused of confusing the divine persons of the Father and the Son, thus they clarify that "when we say in our prayers that the Father will appear in judgment in the person of the Son, we understand by this that the power of the Father given to the Son will be demonstrated in open judgment."[56]

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54. Bourdel et al., "Guanabara Confession (1558)," 118.

55. *Ibid*., 119.

56. *Ibid*.

The fifth paragraph explain with clarity and brevity the Calvinist doctrine of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the eucharist: "faithful souls are really and actually nourished with the proper substance of our Lord Jesus, just as our bodies are nourished with food."[57]

Once the authors move on to the question of whether one should be on his knees to receive the sacrament or not, there is an apparent misattribution in the text, in the reference to "the first canon of the Council of Nicaea."[58] This portion of the text borrows straight from the argument in the *Institutes*, where Calvin affirms that "doubtless the Council of Nicaea meant to forestall this evil when it forbade us to fix our humble attention upon the symbols set before us."[59] Calvin's reference, although obscure, is understood to be to the 20th canon of Nicaea, which concerns whether to offer prayers kneeling or standing.[60] The confessional authors, upon borrowing Calvin's argument, most likely desired to specify the number of the Council, not of the canon, since there were indeed two oecumenical councils held in the city of Nicaea. It is difficult to assert whether the error occurred upon composition or through corruption in the process of transmission of the Confession. However, see below for the supposed intended reading.

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57. Bourdel et al., "Guanabara Confession (1558)," 119.

58. *Ibid*., 120.

59. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 4.17.36.

60. John H. Fulton, *Index Canonum: The Greek Text, an English Translation and a Complete Digest of the Entire Code of Canon Law of the Undivided Primitive Church* (London: James Parker, 1872), 132f.

As was commanded in the canon of the First Council of Nicaea, . . .

. . . instead of. . .

As was commanded in the first canon of the Council of Nicaea, . . .[61]

Figure 2: supposed intended reading.

If paragraph five has served to demonstrate that the Calvinist understanding of the nature of the eucharist is in agreement with the Church Fathers, now paragraph six reminds the reader that patristic tradition cannot stand as the ultimate standard of the Reformed Church, but the Word of God alone, as the confessional authors rightly put it: "and as for the ancient teachers who observed it. . . , especially as such an observation has no foundation in the Word of God, an event which occurred after the institution of the holy Supper; we are not able to allow it necessarily today."[62]

As for paragraphs eight and nine, it is difficult to know what precisely Villegaignon had asked, since article eight refers back to five — as if the authors judged the question had been sufficiently addressed previously —, and article nine offers a broad and inclusive teaching on baptism, also rejecting various additional ceremonies that were commonly observed by the Romanists.

The question of free will is dealt with in the tenth paragraph, featuring a thoroughly biblical exposition. The authors ably combine the teachings of Hosea, John, and Paul, and tie this

61. "Au canon du Premier Concile de Nicée," instead of "au premier canon du Concile de Nicée."

62. Bourdel et al., "Guanabara Confession (1558)," 120.

article with the previous one by referring to "the Christian man, [being] baptized in the blood of Jesus Christ, walking in newness of life."[63]

The eleventh paragraph is another instance where the authors borrow Calvin's argument.[64] The Reformer of Geneva demonstrates that his doctrine is actually in agreement with the Fathers' teaching, in that forgiveness of sins belongs to the Word of God, and even an ordained man is but a minister.

The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth paragraphs shed light on issues on marriage and divorce that were obscured in the Romanist tradition. Much like Calvin, the writers demonstrate good balance when dealing with controversial and secondary issues, presenting the view they find the most biblical, and still reminding the reader when appropriate that "our faith is not founded on this point."[65]

The final two paragraphs deal with the issues of prayer to the saints and for the dead, postulating that prayer should be offered according to the biblical teaching on it, and not in a superstitious manner. Once again, the authors demonstrate that, in that point, the Reformed faith was in agreement with Augustine.

The Guanabara Confession is incredibly well formulated and broad in scope for a document composed in less than a day by a group of laymen under threat of being killed. The authors demonstrate familiarity with the major loci of Reformed theology — specially with Calvin's arguments in his *Institutes* —, and an effective use of Scriptures in the defense of the true Christian faith.

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63. Bourdel et al., "Guanabara Confession (1558)," 121.

64. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, 4.11.1.

65. Bourdel et al., "Guanabara Confession (1558)," 122.

Matos describes the Confession in the following terms:

> Considered as a whole, the Guanabara Confession of Faith reveals three characteristics: (a) it is a biblical confession, abounding in references and arguments taken directly from Scripture; (b) it is a Christian confession: it expresses convictions and concepts inherited from the first centuries of the church; (c) it is a Reformed confession: it contains several key emphases of Calvinism such as the centrality of Scripture, the symbolic nature of the sacraments, the supremacy of Christ, the importance of faith, infant baptism, and election, among others.[66]

Having submitted this Confession, Bourdel, Verneuil, and Bourdon were condemned and drowned in the sea. La Fon was spared on account of the usefulness of his craft for Villegaignon, and Le Balleur had escaped at some point, as mentioned above. Their Confession of Faith as well as the eyewitness account of their martyrdom were brought back to France on May 1558 by the remainder of the Huguenots who left the colony, and were featured in Jean Crespin's 1564 edition of his *Histoire des martyrs*.[67]

That same year of 1558, Villegaignon himself left the colony. He spent the rest of his career defending his reputation after this failed enterprise, counting also with the aid of André Thevet, the royal cosmographer, through his writings. Thevet argued that the Reformed ministers were the ones to blame for the failure of the colony,[68] whereas Léry wrote his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* having as one of his main purposes to debunk Thevet's version of the facts. Léry argued that Thevet had spent a fairly short time in the colony, having left before the Calvinist ministers had even arrived.[69]

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66. Matos, "The Guanabara Confession of Faith," 135, 136.

67. Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs*, vol. 2, bk. 7, 448–466, 506–519.

68. André Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle* (Paris: Chez Guillaume Chaudière, 1575), vol. 2, book 21, 908.

69. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, xlvi–xlviii.

Furthermore, some historians argue that the Calvinists may have had nourished false expectations concerning what they would find in terms of faith and religion in the colony, that is, that Villegaignon had never made any of the promises that they alleged.[70] However, Léry resorts to correspondence that he had access to, and that may be found elsewhere, that may give foundation to his claims.[71]

With the religious conflicts being left unsettled, and the colony not being a high priority to the French government, the Portuguese were then able to retake control over the region two years later, on March, 1560. Back to the Portuguese domain, the mere professing of Protestant religion was punishable as a "crime of Lutheranism." Thus the dream of planting a Brazilian branch of the Reformed Church had to be postponed: the next settlement of Reformed missionaries would take at least other seven decades to occur.

Conclusion

The history of the mission to Antarctic France and of the composition of the Guanabara Confession of Faith reveals the high regard and enthusiasm of the Genevan Church for the spread of the Reformed faith and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ to all corners of the earth, thus fulfilling his Great Commission.[72] The Reformed faith is rooted on the concept of evangelism, and her missionary zeal is evidenced by and through the collected correspondence of John Calvin with ministers and fellow Reformed Christians around the world, and even in colonial Brazil.

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70. Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, xx.

71. *Ibid.*, xlviii.

72. Matthew 28:18–20 KJV.

Whether Villegaignon had a primarily missionary purpose for his adventure or not is still a matter of dispute among scholars, but his need for pleasing the Admiral Gaspard de Coligny — himself openly Protestant — providentially furnished the means necessary for the rudiments of the prototypical Reformed Church in Brazilian lands and the first quasi-established Protestant mission to those native peoples.

Certainly, the greatest testimony and legacy of the French mission to Brazil was the Guanabara Confession of Faith (1558), which was not only the first Reformed confession of the American continent, but also predates several major European statements of faith, such as the French Confession (1559), the Scottish Confession (1560), the Belgic Confession (1561), and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). The Guanabara Confession captures well the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, in that it was signed with the blood of the brave martyrs who had composed it.

A mission's success ought not to be measured based on the number of converts, but rather based on faithful obedience to the commission of "the Lord of the harvest."[73] The first mission to Brazil was short-lived and had no tangible fruit, but the seed of the gospel had been sown for the first time in a new land. The first Reformed missionaries to Brazil were men and women of different personalities and trades, but they all shared a common faith which they were willing to confess and even to die for.

Religious persecution under King Henry II, in both the metropole and the colony, ended up bringing the first Calvinist mission overseas to an abrupt end, even before any conversion among the Brazilian natives could be reported. Indeed, by the Lord's mysterious providence,

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73. Matthew 9:38 KJV.

persecution was the driving force behind all events surrounding the mission to the land of Guanabara. Persecution in the metropole caused the journey to occur; persecution in the colony caused controversy in worship. Persecution in the metropole caused Villegaignon to fear; persecution in the colony caused the Church to bravely state her faith.

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