

Guizot and Protestantism

Introduction delivered on Saturday, September 14, 2024 at the Society for the History of French Protestantism (SHPF), as part of the commemorations of the 150th anniversary of the death of François Guizot

by Stéphane Coste,

President of the François Guizot association.

Mr. President of the SHPF, Dear André Encrevé, Dear Members of the SHPF, Dear Members of the Association François Guizot, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends and Cousins,

It is with great pride that I take the floor today as President of the Association François Guizot.

The aim of our association is to encourage the study of the intellectual and political work of François Guizot, and to promote the family and institutional archives of Guizot and his family.

On September 12, 2024, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the death of this exceptional man. Don't hesitate to discover the comprehensive dossier produced by the Institut de France for this occasion on www.guizot.com. Today, we're continuing our commemorations begun in March on Guizot's key themes.

After lectures on Europe at the Quai d'Orsay, whose construction Guizot launched, on history, memory and politics at the congress of the Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, founded by Guizot in 1834, and by Edouard Philippe on education at Val-Richer, Guizot's Normandy residence, we continue this evening with the Protestant religion so dear to Guizot, with a talk by André Encrevé, whom we thank warmly. His talk is entitled: "François Guizot and French Protestantism under the Second Empire".

André Encrevé is one of today's leading French Protestant intellectuals. He is a historian and Professor Emeritus of Contemporary History at the Université Paris-Est Créteil Val-de-Marne. He has published numerous works on Protestantism, particularly in the 19th century, and knows Guizot very well. His doctoral thesis focused on nineteenth-century French Protestants. He holds an honorary doctorate from the Institut protestant de théologie - Faculté de théologie protestante de Paris. He is also the dean of the board of the SHPF.

François Guizot was born in 1787, just before Louis XVI signed the Edict of Toleration on November 29, 1787, granting civil status to Protestants in France. Would his life have been different if this edict had not been signed? He died in 1874, 87 years later, under the Third Republic. What a life between these two dates and political regimes!

He was a French historian, politician and intellectual whose contributions to society were many and significant.

- As Minister of Public Instruction under the July Monarchy, he played a crucial role in promoting primary education, making instruction accessible to a greater number of children thanks to the Guizot Law of 1833.
- Politically, Guizot was the first Protestant since Sully to be appointed to the highest offices of state, and was an ardent defender of liberal ideas and constitutional monarchy, seeking to reconcile revolutionary ideals with monarchical stability.
- A fervent Protestant, Guizot also championed the values of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience, influencing the religious and cultural landscape of France at the time.
- His influence as a historian can be seen in his work on the history of civilization in Europe, where he sought to understand and explain the foundations of European social and political development.

His name remains closely associated with the idea of a modern, advanced France. He remains a key figure in French history, whose political and educational legacy continues to resonate beyond the boundaries of time, reminding us of the importance of enlightened thinking and universal access to education for the prosperity of a nation.

I would like to conclude with the recent publication of François Guizot's “Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps”, an edition compiled, presented and annotated by Laurent Theis, a well-known representative of the SHPF.

I would like to thank the SHPF for its warm welcome and enthusiasm in organizing this conference.

Thank you for your attention.

Stéphane Coste