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Refuge, Resistance, and Rebellion: Humanism and the Middle Way in the French Wars of Religion

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Refuge, Resistance, and Rebellion: Humanism and the Middle Way in the French Wars of Religion

BY

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B.A. *magna cum laude*, Ohio University, 1998
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Abstract

The assumption that civil war era France divided neatly into two ideological parties is common within the historical scholarly literature. There were, more accurately, three ideological groups in France by the outbreak of the Civil Wars in 1562. Firstly was the reactionary party, made up of entrenched forces of the Crown that had adopted much of the outward symbols of the Renaissance/Humanist movement but at root remained essentially regressive. The Moderate Party, secondly, made up mostly of Catholic Humanists and Renaissance scholars who adopted much of the essence of reform, but stopped short of calling for systematic societal change through revolution. Third, was the Huguenot Party who collated renaissance and humanist understandings into a systematized body of thought, and then proceeded to the next logical step of calling for an essential societal revolution.

The 'middle way', described above, preceded the *politique* party that arose later, becoming prominent especially during the reign of Henri III, but was not identical to it. The middle way that this essay proposes advocated moderate reform in the state as well as the church. It retained much of the outward structures/symbols of the old order but contained the substance of the new changes of the Renaissance. They did not necessarily urge the construction of a powerful, even absolute, royal authority.

This trifold division of French society, as well as the concomitant struggle for power that it entailed, contributed to the violence that typified that second half of the 16th century in France. The Crown and established Church sought to maintain power as well as the fundamental societal structures that undergirded their power. The Moderate Party remained loyal to the old order but raised cautious voices against violence, intolerance, and bloodshed. The Genevan/Huguenot party responded initially by passive acceptance, then with armed conflict.

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I. Argument and Historiographical Essay:

This essay proposes that there were at least three major ideological groups in Civil War era France. The reactionary side was composed essentially of the forces of the Crown and the Catholic Church. This group had adopted much of the outward symbols of the Renaissance/Humanist movement but remained essentially regressive in the policies it pursued. The *Middle Way* consisted largely of humanist scholars and those influenced by the humanist movement. They adopted much of the essence of reform, but stopped short of calling for systematic societal change through revolution. Most often the Middle Way appears in the scholarly literature as being merely part of the Catholic/Royalist side or the Protestant/Huguenot group rather than as a group in their own right. Lastly, there is the Huguenot side. This group combined Renaissance and Reformation understandings into a systematized body of thought. They then proceeded to call for reform that went deeper than the mere externals of the Renaissance.

There was a consistent call for change coming from the radical Calvinists and an equally consistent call for reform emanating from the humanists. The Crown and the Church were the targets of these calls for change. Both, however, occupied a position of authority and prestige at the center of networks of power largely undergirded by feudal webs of interconnectivity and obligation. A substantive change to either the religious or the political sphere—such as that which both the Calvinists and the Humanists suggested—could be construed as threats to the traditional order, maintained by the elites of Church and State. Challenged by two very different yet formidable foes, the Royalist/Catholic forces within the Kingdom of France struggled to maintain not only their power but also the societal bases upon which their power rested.

It is possible that the violence typical of the second half of the 16th century in France resulted from the reactionary forces of the Crown attempting to maintain the networks upon which their power rested, the Church, essentially feudal networks of loyalty, and a civil cohesion based upon the acceptance of a hierarchically ordered society. The Crown rested its authority both on networks of personal allegiance, combined with the ecclesiastical sanction provided by the Church, embodied most clearly in the *sacre*. The Huguenots threatened these structures. They did this through their emphasis on allegiance to the new structure of the Reformed Church, a society that accepted the rudiments of egalitarianism, partly shown by the fact that they eliminated the distinction between cleric and laity, as well as a conditional monarchy based upon the monarch's right, or godly, conduct. Any government wishes to maintain its own power—otherwise there would be very little point in being a government. The French monarchs of the sixteenth century used legal measures, military force of arms, religious persecution, and propaganda to achieve their goal. The Middle Way remained loyal to the old order but raised cautious objections against violence, intolerance, and bloodshed. The Huguenot side responded initially by passive acceptance, then with armed conflict.

A prosopological approach dominates this essay. It moves toward a broader intellectual history of the period, utilizing close textual analysis of the materials combined with a comparative approach that examines the context of the civil wars from a diverse group of writers. Germane to this subject is the dimension of power. Some, like Catherine de Medici, had tremendous power. Others, like Pierre de l'Étoile had little or no power. Consequently, the former remains prominent in discussions of sixteenth century France while the latter much less so. Nevertheless, their historical records survive. A comparative study of both groups is useful in establishing how a variety of levels within society perceived the wars. This study attempts to

bring both groups into the narrative. An attempt to span the spectrum of literate French society undergirds the choice of individuals under study as well.

What factors guided the selection of the various individuals under study in this essay? The guiding principle has been to represent the three sides with those who not only typify the thought of each group, but also spans as much of the spectrum as possible. John Calvin, for example, was not only the spiritual and intellectual leader of the Reformed group within France, but he was also a commoner who had received a humanist education, followed by a protestant conversion. For this reason, John Calvin's life and work appear most in focus for the purposes of this essay for the Huguenot side. While there were other reformers within the French and Swiss religious movements, like Martin Bucer, Guillaume Farel, and Heinrich Bullinger, none matched the stature of Calvin. His thought, sharp, acerbic, and very much opposed to the traditional order. Only by understanding Calvin's thought, and the revolutionary implications of his ideas, can one better approach the *guerres*. Other noted Huguenots thinkers appear in this discussion, such as François Hotman, the political theorist.

Figures like Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549), sister of François I and queen of Navarre, demonstrate the origins of the middle way that I am seeking to establish in the sixteenth century French context. She maintained her loyalty to the traditional power structures of French government and society while working for reform through her work and writings. She could carry on a lively correspondence with the Pope while sheltering Huguenot writers and thinkers like Clement Marot.

Pierre de l'Estoile (1546-1611), a commoner, but well educated and from a good family. He was connected with both Agrippa d'Aubigné and François Béroalde de Verville. His view of

the Civil Wars is supportive of my thesis: it maintains a firm loyalty towards the Crown and even the traditional Church but, on the other hand, it maintains a balanced restraint and even a respect for some aspects of the reform movement. He is able to criticize both sides and walk a middle path. This middle way is precisely the point that this thesis presents. Jean Bodin (1530-1596) was a political writer who advocated for a certain kind of religious toleration as well as a firm belief in the absolute power of the monarch/Crown. He represented, clearly, a third way between the amoral admonitions of Niccolò Macchiavelli, arguably represented by Catherine de Medici, and the more revolutionary protestant view that seemed to completely overturn the traditional order.

Guillaume and Michel Le Riche (journal kept for years of 1534-1586): Guillaume le Riche's journals serve, in some ways, as a control. A government official, the Le Riche journals provide a wealth of detail dealing with the outbreak of Protestantism and the Civil Wars during the sixteenth century. These represent, therefore, eye-witness accounts from the point of view of a government official (*advocat du roi*). Poitevins, Guillaume and his son Michel saw/experienced some of the worst fighting of the wars and were in a unique position to evaluate what was going on around them.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592): the formulation of sceptical humanism that distanced itself from both parties of the wars. He maintained, thus, an uneasy neutrality among all three. He maintained outward conformity while writing stinging critiques of the order of the day. Montaigne maintained a traditionalist facade while making some radical critiques of the regime and the wars. Like the other examples, these two help to demonstrate this essay's main point: Montaigne questioned and doubted, leaving little if any room for absolute certainty in any field. He was loyal to the old order but seems to have advocated for reform quietly.

The choice of those from among the Royalist/Catholic party represents a similar distribution of people across the societal spectrum. François de Lorraine (1519-1563) represents the more reactionary party. His family, the Guises, were powerful competitors for control both in the Church and in the royal government. The Guise opposed any challenge to the traditional order of power/structures of power that emerged from the more radical Calvinists. Claude Haton (whose memoirs cover the years 1553-1582), on the other hand, represents the more reactionary party and the traditional structures of power within the French government and society. He was a priest in eastern France whose opposition to the Huguenots caused him to lead a band of warrior-priests to fight the Protestants.

Catherine de Medici (1519-1589), queen mother of France--power behind the throne of her sons François II, Charles IX and Henri III. She attempted to maintain the traditional structures of France but bring a certain measure of Machiavellian humanism to the religious disputes tearing the kingdom apart. These two represent the opposite extremes: radical Calvinism on the one hand and royal/Machiavellian cynicism on the other. Blaise de Monluc (1502-1577) was a dedicated general and servant of the Crown and traditional Church that displayed an unsurpassed loyalty to the old order. These two also represent polar opposites: Monluc was a committed traditionalist, unquestioning of power.

Pamphlets of the Catholic League: These documents used some of the newest technologies and approaches, i.e. printing and appealing to a growing mass literacy, to spread an ideology that attacked the Crown, the Huguenots, and the new king Henri IV. They were thus harnessing modernity to advance a reactionary policy.

Taken together, from Calvin on the one extreme, to Catherine de Medici on the other, it becomes clear that there was a web of connectivity within France at this time that defies easy groupings or sharp delineations. The selection of individuals described above is meant, at least in part, to demonstrate this fact and provide the reader with a sampling of the rich spectrum of people and conflicts that was Civil War era France.

By itself, the phenomenon of a religious or civil war is not difficult to explain. Two parties with opposing viewpoints vied for control of the state. The result was bloodshed. The period between 1560 and 1589, however, is more than just a simple clash of incompatible ideologies. While it *was* a clash, the violence, cruelty, and brutalities of the period defy easy explanation. Historians like Mack Holt, Natalie Zemon-Davis, Mark Greengrass, and Robert Knecht have debated the cause of the civil wars as well as the violence that came to typify them. The result of their studies suggests that there were a variety of causes, including economic factors, class warfare, and even the involvement of Philip II's Spain as an outgrowth of his war with the Calvinists in the Low Countries. This essay proposes that the violence emerged from neither class nor economic struggle. Rather it emerges from (at least) two sources: deeply held religious belief on both sides of the religious spectrum (Catholic and Protestant), coupled with a reactionary policy pursued by the French Crown that sought to preserve both its traditional legitimacy and power bases. The Crown wished, however, to present itself as the embodiment of Renaissance and humanist attitudes towards philosophy, art, governance, and education. A paradox emerges in that the Crown pursued a regressive, even reactionary policy towards religion and society in the kingdom, while projecting an image that appeared to be *avant-garde*. While the hypothesis that religion really was the cause of the civil wars is not novel, the focus on the tension that existed between the Crown's projected image of Renaissance humanism and its

reactionary policies certainly is. In fact, it appears to be absent from the scholarly literature surrounding the Wars of Religion.

This essay suggests that while there has been an extensive amount of work dealing with the French Wars of Religion and its causes, there is little, however, that goes beyond superficial examinations and explanations of the violence. Historians like Natalie Zemon-Davis, Mack Holt, and R.J. Knecht divide the country into two camps: Protestant and Catholic. Those who attempted to maintain neutrality or sought moderation, like Etienne de la Boetie, Michel de Montaigne, and Marguerite de Navarre, receive mention as isolated individuals. These historians class them with the “Catholic” and “Royalist” parties, providing little in the way of explanations for why these individuals remained isolated within the historical context of sixteenth century France. The interpretation that this work suggests provides a lens through which to view the Catholic and Protestant forces within France during the Civil Wars. It also provides a way to examine, and perhaps explain, the emergence of a third way between the two extreme parties.

When one examines the French Civil Wars, it becomes possible to say that the Crown and the supporters of the traditional order adopted the outward symbolism of the Renaissance while leaving its pre-Renaissance core intact. This means that they maintained the royal supremacy, the dominance of the Roman Church, noble privilege guaranteed through oaths of loyalty and service to the Crown, and the traditional societal order. The central point is that all of these provided the underpinnings for the Crown’s own power. The Huguenots adopted both the symbolism and the substance of the new theological trends that emerged out of the Renaissance movement. This radical, avant garde form of Renaissance novelty became embodied specifically in Calvinism. One of the emphases of the humanists was to skip over the centuries of the “middle ages”, go directly to the “pure” fountains of classical Roman and Christian antiquity. This drive

ad fontes animated first Luther and then Calvin to re-forge the Church in Western Europe in a way that was at once novel and intensely ancient — at least in their minds. The ramifications of their new understanding spread into areas beyond the confines of Church doctrine and practice. Society too needed change—provided, of course, by the Calvinists. This posed a threat to the Crown, Church, and power of the nobility, as well as the stability of the social order. A moderate side existed between the extremes that maintained outward conformity to the traditional order while advocating for moderate reform and change. *This* group descended intellectually from another strain of humanism embodied in writers like Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, and Guillaume Budé. Their approach did not rely on calls to arms or revolution. Through proper education (meaning the classics of Roman and Christian antiquity; fluency in the Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and sometimes Persian and Aramaic languages; as well as rhetoric, the arts, and mathematics), change would, they hoped, emerge.

Among scholarly historians, there is a tendency to present the French Civil Wars as a clear bi-polarity between Protestants and Catholics. There is little suggestion of a middle way between these two. Even when texts hint that there may be a middle way, the individuals cited tend to appear within the pale of one or the other side. Most importantly, the distinction between how these various parties used the symbols and substance of the new learning of the Renaissance is also absent. Arlette Jouanna, author of *La Saint Barthélemy: Les mystères d'un crime d'État*, writes, speaking only of 24 August 1572—day of the pivotal massacres of the wars--"*Une journée qui a fait la France? Incontestablement.*"¹ (Author's Translation: A day that made France? Without any doubt.) Her argument is simple: the violence of that day ended the momentum of the Protestant movement; forced the monarchy towards an absolutist stance; and sowed the seeds for later secularization

¹ Arlette Jouanna, *La Saint Barthélemy: Les Mystères d'un Crime d'État* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 301.

within French society.² The French Wars of Religion were no mere footnote to history but were the very heart of the development of the nation. Her argument is vital to full understanding of the sixteenth century and is a fundamental starting point for this investigation. To grasp fully the implications of what she is arguing, it is necessary to understand the cultural milieu of sixteenth century France. Why, for example, did the Calvinist Reformation cause such a deep rift in the center of French society and national life? If the Lutheran Reformation sought some sort of accommodation to the traditions and practices of Roman Catholicism, Calvinism did not. It is thus with Calvin that the historian of the Civil Wars needs to start.

A text that provides the historian with an overview of this period that compliments the text dealing with the Saint Barthélemy is another work by Jouanna, *La France du XVIe Siècle: 1483-1598*.³ She presents a broad overview of the time, stressing on the role of the Crown in the response to the growing Protestant movement. Her central argument is that the royal authority in France was able to centralize and consolidate itself even in the midst of the chaos and apparent societal collapse of the period. This point is of central importance: the Crown was willing to prosecute its agenda, consolidate its power, and eliminate opposition by any means necessary. Jouanna's *Saint Barthélemy* and her *France du XVI Siècle* present a coherent picture of the French Crown feeling deeply threatened by the rise of the Protestant movement in France. If Protestantism represented merely a theological trend, then this is almost inexplicable. If, however, the Reformed Protestantism of Calvin presented a radical religious *and* societal change, then that helps to explain why the established power feared its rise so deeply: it represented a threat to their power and position in society. Jouanna is also important because she represents contemporary trends in French

² Ibid, 301-307.

³ Arlette Jouanna, *La France du XVIe siècle : 1483-1598* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2006).

historiography. Jouanna, however, does not address the four key points that appear at the beginning of this essay. There is no mention of any more than two ideological sides. Also missing is the question of how each group used the symbolism and the substance of the Renaissance. She shows with great clarity the links between religion, politics, and the state in early modern France and how those strands intertwined. Judith Sproxton in her work *Violence and Religion: Attitudes Towards Militancy in the French Civil Wars and the English Revolution* provides further scholarly research dealing with the intertwining of faith and politics. She presents the outbreak of the wars as the product of a certain tension, namely that of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in France during the 16th century. Her detailed presentation demonstrates a great depth of knowledge of the period. Her conceptual model appears to be the more standard bi-partite division that this essay suggests is not complete enough for a well-rounded view of the period. In addition, the historiographical content of the text appears weak. She does not offer the researcher a clear reason as to why she groups the French Civil Wars of the 16th century with the very different conditions of the English Civil Wars a century later.⁴

The connection between religion and politics as the origin of the Civil Wars has a long pedigree, a review of which will help to position the intervention that this essay seeks to make within the corpus of scholarly literature. Stretching back to German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) traditional historiography attributes the Civil Wars to the link between religion and politics rather than to the attempt on the part of the reactionary royal authority to maintain its structures of power. Von Ranke was an astute historian noting the fact that the Reformed religion

⁴ For more information see Judith Sproxton, *Violence and Religion: Attitudes Towards Militancy in the French Civil Wars and the English Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1995).

posed a particular threat to the traditional order of early modern French society.⁵ For Ranke the Calvinist Reformation represents a challenge to the unified nature of French society. This suggests that the wars arose as the synthesis created from the thesis of French Catholic society and the antithesis of the Calvinist Reformation. It is interesting to note that von Ranke rarely, if ever, directs readers to the primary source documents of the period. He presents his conclusions in a confident, even authoritarian way, providing little information to the reader as to how he arrived at his conclusions.

Ranke's approach echoes the work of Jules Michelet (1798-1874). Michelet does not stress the political explanation for the outbreak of the Wars of Religion. Instead, he tends to place more of the blame onto the Guise family and to the failure of Catherine De'Medici.⁶ For Michelet the fanaticism of the Guises and the political failure of Catherine De'Medici combined to produce the horrors of the Wars. The statement of Michelet does present a problem for the modern historian in that it appears to represent an *ad hominem* attack on Catherine more than a dispassionate historical evaluation. For von Ranke, to reiterate, it was the Hegelian clash between Catholic/Royalist and the new forces of modernity embodied by the Reformed Religion. For Michelet, apparently, the failures of the Guise family and Catherine De'Medici sparked the long cycle of civil wars in France. These two views, though united by the nineteenth century belief in teleological history, differ in terms of their ultimate attribution of the causes of the wars and the violence. The problem for the modern historian, with both of these early nineteenth-century historical approaches, is the fact that most historians now largely disfavor, or even completely reject, the idea of inevitability in their writing. Nothing is fated to happen, in other words. For the modern historical academy, there is no larger,

⁵ Leopold von Ranke, *Civil Wars and Monarchy in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), 303.

⁶ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France du Seizième Siècle: Guerres de Religion* (Paris: Chamero, 1856), 298.

spiritual plan unfolding just beyond the experience of ordinary humanity. As in the case with Arlette Jouanna, there is no hint of a tri-partite division of the country, or any understanding of the way in which each group reconciled its fundamental ideological paradigm with the symbolism and substance of the new learning of the Renaissance. Most importantly, there is no particular attempt to explain the level of violence that characterized the Civil Wars beyond the normal expectation that war is, of course, a violent event.

Nonetheless, the religious violence of the sixteenth century is in need of an explanation. There is, by way of counterpoint, the view that places the blame on the Catholic Guises as well as upon the Queen Regent and the young Charles IX. Henry Dwight Sedgwick presents another template that tends to place the blame for the outbreak of the violence more overtly upon the Huguenots, especially in the Languedoc. Traditionally, various schools of thought developed surrounding each side involved in the *guerres*. Some blame the Catholics. This usually represents more overtly Protestant historians. Others, like Sedgwick, place the blame on the Protestant faction itself. While perhaps not the approach the modern historians frequently adopt, it does provide the historian with detail examinations of both sides. Sedgwick suggests that the Huguenots provoked broader French Catholic society into acts of violence.⁷ This approach appears to rest heavily on a Catholic interpretation of the wars and who, ultimately was to blame. In this regard, it appears to lack in objectivity. There is no apparent attempt to seek a solution beyond the application of the *lex talionis*. Sedgwick does not draw the conclusion that the Crown itself was trying to maintain its traditional power structures or to cloak an essentially regressive political agenda behind the mask of modernity. So far, the historians examined have tended to explain the wars in sociological terms. Given the fact that France was a major kingdom within western Europe, the possibility that

⁷ Henry Dwight Sedgwick, *The House of Guise* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938), 130.

economic factors may have given rise to the Civil Wars, or at least, one must consider that they exacerbated the violence. Sedgwick avoids the essential semiotics of the age. The use of the symbols and substance of the day, in short the ideologies and the way they may have affected the behavior of the individuals involved, is oddly missing in his work.

Another school of thought sees the French Wars of Religion in overtly economic terms. Representing American scholarship in the 1950s, James Westfall Thompson argues that the combination of religion and politics typical of sixteenth century France is the best explanation for the wars.⁸ He nuances his approach, however, by incorporating a detailed economic explanation for the wars that, for him, explains the conflict in much more powerful terms than religious or political ones alone.⁹ Thompson thus tends to disfavor the purely religious causes on economic grounds. If he were correct, this creates a certain paradox, namely that the Wars of Religion had very little to do with religion. This approach might reflect a growing trend away from faith-based explanations of the wars that seem to have gained popularity as the twentieth century progressed. While certainly not without value, Thompson's approach seems inherently flawed. It seems to assume that the religious beliefs of both sides were not genuine. Economic matters, political struggles, or even class questions drove the conflict.

Many scholars have already suggested religious, political, or even economic engines driving the Civil Wars. Another school of historical thought turns to more overtly religious rhetoric/propaganda as a vehicle for societal change and for the outbreaks of the war. Donald R. Kelley demonstrates well the use of Calvinist theological rhetoric to achieve political goals in his work *François Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal*. Kelley argues that Hotman (1524-1590) was

⁸ James Westfall Thompson, *The Wars of Religion in France 1559-1576* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1957), 11.

⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

more than just a reformer. Rather than seek to work for gradual change within the system that existed in France, Hotman sought change that is much more fundamental.¹⁰ While the author of various works dealing with subjects as diverse as personal devotion, theology and law, the work that Kelley draws the reader's attention to assiduously is the *Franco-Gallia*. Published by Hotman first in 1573, the *Franco-Gallia* presented the French body politic with a recipe for an all-encompassing reform not only of the church but the state. The basis for his political discourse was both Calvinist religious assumptions and an appeal to early French history. For Hotman, as Kelley shows, the Gallic and Germanic (Frankish) nations fused into a whole.¹¹ Hotman believed that the Gauls, "...actually welcomed the invading Franks and the 'enfranchisement' they offered...Whence the establishment of 'Franco-Gallia.'"¹² Kelley notes that, "The cornerstone of the Franco-Gallican virtue was the principle of popular sovereignty--'the supreme authority of the people,' in Hotman's phrase, 'The kings of Franco-Gallia were made by the right of the people,' he declared, 'rather than by any hereditary right.'"¹³ The phrases used here, such as 'by the right of the people,' apart from having a clear resonance with the French Revolution of two centuries later, also represent a clarion call against the sixteenth century view of Kingship inherent within the French state. If Kelley is correct in his assessment of François Hotman, then the challenge to traditional French society is clear. If this represents a fundamental challenge to French society, that same society's reaction against the Huguenot minority begins to appear more comprehensible. One possible objection to Kelley's argument is the fact that while many of the elites could indeed read, it is open to question how many of the *bourgeoisie* or lower classes would have either read or been exposed to the ideas of Hotman. How conscious would the average person have been of the characteristics of the Franks or

¹⁰ Donald R. Kelley, *François Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1973), vii-viii.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 241.

¹² *Ibid*, 242.

¹³ *Ibid*.

the ancient Gauls? Kelley does not deal with these questions, leaving the researcher merely to speculate.

If, as Kelley pointed out, Hotman and the Huguenots were pressing for popular sovereignty based not only on Calvinist principles of ecclesiastical governance, but also on supposed traditions of Frankish freedom, it follows then that the traditional view was also embedded within a politico-ecclesiastical framework. James Collins, author of *The State in Early Modern France*, shows that the Royalist/Catholic side occupied precisely the opposite position from the Huguenots religiously and politically. He demonstrates that the fact that the French monarchs occupied a semi-sacred position was not a license to act freely, but rather a fetter that bound them to certain standards.¹⁴ Historian Mack Holt supports Collins and the contention that the French system linked divine and royal powers at a fundamental level. The *sacre* was an external visual representation of the internal belief that King and Church merged into one.¹⁵ If for the Calvinists, as Kelley demonstrated, the generality of the 'people of the covenant' had an abstract right to rule the church and the state, then for the Catholics, as Collins shows, royal power was inextricably tied to the divine authority of the Roman Church. These two points of view appear to be incompatible.

To further complicate how the scholarly community views the linkage of royal and divine power in Early Modern France, historian Michael Wintroub, in his work *A Savage Mirror: Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Early Modern France*, emphasizes the fact that the *rex christianissimus* was expected by society and the Church to uphold Catholic orthodoxy within the realm. The emergence of a threat to the Catholic order of things represented a deformation, or even corruption,

¹⁴ James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 80.

¹⁵ Mack Holt ed., *Renaissance and Reformation France* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 9.

of that order.¹⁶ Clearly, Wintroub's understanding of the role of the Catholic kings implies that there was a similarity in structure between the French Crown and theocratic role of the Ottoman sultans. It is possible that Wintroub, among others, is intimating that there were theocratic elements to the Early Modern French Crown.

Historian Luc Racaut provides the researcher with a further extension of the idea that sees the origin of the wars as being rooted in specifically religious propaganda.¹⁷ To reiterate, while historians like Holt and Knecht tend to root the violence and the origin of the wars in the combination of religion and politics, suggesting thereby a kind of French caesaro-papism, Racaut precisely reverses this. It was in the divorce of politics and religion, or in this case, Crown opposed to church, that provided the impetus for violence and war, at least on the Catholic/Royalist side. Racaut, in his article "The Sacrifice of the Mass and the Redefinition of Catholic Orthodoxy during the French Wars of Religion," further problematizes the role of the Guise family. He focuses on the efforts of Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine, towards conciliation with the Protestants. Racaut suggests, as an interpretive paradigm, that Lorraine was trying the nearly impossible task of balancing the Calvinists of France, the Lutherans of the Empire, the Catholics of France, and the rest of Europe through his work at the Colloquy of Poissy (1562) called by Catherine De'Medici.¹⁸ By arguing thus, Racaut enriches the overall historical debate. Rather than seeing the Guise family as merely Roman Catholic fanatics, unwilling to compromise or even talk with Protestants, Racaut highlights the ways in which at least one member of the Guise family heroically sought to balance opposing sides. Ironically, his willingness to compromise earned him a negative reputation. The

¹⁶ Michael Wintroub, *Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006), 99.

¹⁷ Luc Racaut, "Education of the Laity and Advocacy of Violence during the French Wars of Religion," *History* 95, no. 318 (April, 2010): 159-176, 159.

¹⁸ Luc Racaut, "Sacrifice of the Mass and the Redefinition of Catholic Orthodoxy during the French Wars of Religion," *French History* 24, no. 1 (2009): 20-39, 23.

refusal of the various parties to compromises suggests that blame for the outbreak of the war and the every-increasing cycle of violence rests with all of the parties involved, rather than on any one individual or group. This implies what one could term a communal origin of the wars.

Historian Mark Konnert, author of "Urban Values Versus Religious Passion: Châlons-sur-Marne during the Wars of Religion," further problematizes the question of the origins of the French Wars of Religion by focusing on the community-based factors involved. Henri IV, in converting from Protestantism to Catholicism, promised to uphold the Catholic faith in the Kingdom. Châlons-sur-Marne believed this promise and decided to support the king.¹⁹ He writes that, "The actions of the city council reveal hitherto little-noticed aspects of the urban experiences during the Wars of Religion: a devotion to ideals of urban solidarity and integrity, and commitment to a civic agenda, both pursued in the midst of and despite religious division with the city and within France at large."²⁰ In historiographical terms, this suggests that communal identity, being more important than individual identity, may have swayed many communities to declare for one side or the other, deepening the lines of division between the various parties of the *Guerres*.

Within the scholarly community, another school of thought deserves attention. Robin Briggs, in a vein similar to Mark Konnert, problematizes the duality of Protestant/Radical and Catholic/Royalist by suggesting that there were other factors at work. Even more basic to the problem than religion and politics, according to Briggs, were the facts that the French population was growing quickly, perhaps overtaxing what amounted to the infrastructure of the time. This caused a certain destabilization of society.²¹ Briggs argues convincingly that even the rapid spread of printed material, a development of the fifteenth century, permitted sometimes subtle, at other

¹⁹ Mark Konnert, "Urban Values versus Religious Passion: Chalons-sur-Marne during the Wars of Religion," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20, no. 3 (1989): 387-405.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 387.

²¹ Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France: 1560-1715* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), 9.

times much more overt, changes within the traditional societal structures of Early Modern France.²² Clearly, the social conflict experienced in France during the sixteenth century gradually transformed into a religious struggle.

Some scholarly literature tends to favor a class-based explanation of the growth of the Huguenot movement. From this perspective, Protestantism represented a middle and upper class revolt. However, as other authors in the scholarly community show, this understanding is currently under challenge. The changes taking place in France at this time cut across the spectrum of class and gender, a point that Robert J. Knecht emphasizes in his work *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France*. He notes that, "most historians currently working on the origins of French Protestantism are skeptical about linking them too rigidly to socio-economic conditions...The Huguenot lists show that Calvinism drew its adherents from virtually all strata of society and from a bewildering variety of occupations."²³ Since this appears to be a sound interpretation, arguing that the origin of the wars was primarily economic seems problematic. To complicate this argument however, it is only necessary to turn to another of Knecht's works, *The French Civil Wars*. Knecht suggests that foreign wars diverted the French king's attention and money into external affairs, allowing the Huguenot movement to thrive.²⁴ Knecht notes that, "Henry admitted to the imperial ambassador that other business had prevented him from dealing with the problem [of the Huguenots]. He denounced Geneva as 'the source of much evil because many heretics are received there and thence disseminate errors into France.'"²⁵ Knecht thus appears to contradict himself. While ruling out economic or class-based approaches in one text, he tends to favor it in another. Stuart Carroll suggests in his work *Noble Power during the French Wars of Religion* that the central way to explain the wars of

²² Ibid, 9.

²³ Robert J. Knecht, *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France, 1483-1610* (London: Blackwell, 2001), 264.

²⁴ Robert J. Knecht, *The French Civil Wars* (London: Longman, 2000), 59-60.

²⁵ Knecht, *Civil Wars*, 60.

religion is indeed class based, but not in the more overtly Marxist sense that is suggested by the other works examined here. His approach posits that it was an interconnected network of noble power and obligation. This connects particularly with the Guise family, which triggered a cycle of violence that lasted for the better part of forty years. While interesting, this approach too does not suggest a tripartite view of society and participation in the Civil Wars within France, preferring the traditional bi-partite division, as well as ignoring the way in which the ideological parties utilized the symbols and substance of Renaissance learning and change.

The authors listed above have suggested that religion, politics, and economics were conspiring together to threaten the *status quo*. The scholarly literature complicates this view by examining the Court of France itself. The historian is justified in asking, does the description of the French court—reactionary, conservative, and even hostile to advancement, seen often in academic texts dealing with pre-Revolutionary France—reflect reality? Robert J. Knecht's work, *The French Renaissance Court, 1483-1589*, provides one possible answer. Knecht paints a much more enlightened picture, especially of the Court of François I.²⁶ If the court genuinely was enlightened (according to the standards of the time), then it becomes difficult to see it as the locus of opposition to change. One could disagree by saying that the Court of François I was not, in fact, enlightened and did not need to be. The crown was also faced with grave difficulties, such as the wars of religion themselves and the social and economic upheavals they caused, as well as international problems stemming from a growing Habsburg encirclement of France. Given the fact that this king died in 1547, how could the historian use his policies to make an argument for acts of violence that emerged in 1562? This argument is valid up to a certain point. François I was indeed confronted by a rather virulent strain of Reformation thought, even having the privacy of his bedchamber invaded during

²⁶ Robert J. Knecht, *The French Renaissance Court, 1483-1589* (New Haven: Yale University, 2008), xxii.

the “*affaires des placards*” of 1534. The point that Knecht appears to be making is that the court remained 'enlightened' even after several acts of violence directed against the king. A weakness of this work, however, is the fact that the author does not introduce the reader to the primary source material surrounding the various major events that appear in the text. The historian must rely entirely upon the opinion of Knecht without reference to documentary evidence that shows the validity of his conclusions.

The scholarly literature, generally, supports the idea that the French Court remained tolerant of the Protestant movement in its earliest days. This may not have been because of an inherent tolerance on the part of François I or Henri II. The origin of the tolerance, as Knecht suggests in his work, *Francis I*, may lie in the fact that early French Protestantism was ill defined. He writes that, "For nearly two decades the Protestant Reformation in France offered no clear-cut confessions of faith; its adherents felt free to switch from one doctrine to another in their search for the truth."²⁷ This fact, along with the Humanists who, as in the case of Marguerite de Navarre, tended to offer at least guarded support of the Huguenot cause, may explain why the early sixteenth century French monarchs offered little resistance to the Reform movement. This changed over time as the inherent challenge to the traditional structures of power from Huguenotism became clearer. The more reactionary phase of the French Crown evolved over time.

Knecht suggests that the French monarchs, very specifically, were dependent upon the personal prestige of the king to be successful. This implies that the power of the Crown was contingent upon other factors, especially the favor of the great provincial nobles throughout the country.²⁸ The early death of François II allowed the Guise family to assume much more power in

²⁷ Robert J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982), 248.

²⁸ Knecht, *Francis I*, 243.

the realm. Their deep commitment to the Catholic faith precluded the possibility of a rapprochement with the Huguenots or the more moderate humanists. Certainly the scholarly literature notes the way in which the lines separating the two warring parties hardened as the decades passed. Maurice Andrieux, author of *Henri IV*, notes that in the early 1560s, both sides realized the need for equilibrium for the good of the kingdom.²⁹ This suggests that the peace was precarious at best, a fact reflected by the scholarly literature. Andrieux's work however demonstrates a deeply patriotic vein that sees, in Henri IV, the perfect embodiment of the French character. This approach is rather similar to the *geistlich* history of Ranke and Michelet. Hence, the work remains problematic for the contemporary historian.

The precariousness of the peace and the willingness of the Crown to compromise as far as it deemed possible with the Huguenots is also demonstrated by Knecht's biography of the Queen Mother and Regent of France during the years 1562-1589. Entitled simply, *Catherine De'Medici*, Knecht's work depicts a vigorous and intelligent woman who undertook the herculean task of maintaining the integrity of the Kingdom against the external threat of the Spanish and the internal threat of the Huguenot movement. Knecht argues that Catherine, far from being supercilious or wavering, was genuinely interested in the well-being of France and sought, above all, to reconcile all sides. Her chosen method was the humanist institution of the council. She believed that reasonable negotiations ought to pacify all of the warring parties. In the years following Vassy (1562-1566), Catherine's position was particularly difficult. Knecht suggests that Catherine "could not allow the Huguenots to mount a rebellion and took active steps to increase the size of the king's army, yet was reluctant to fight without making a final attempt at negotiation."³⁰ This suggests that the woman so often blamed for the ever-increasing cycles of violence may well have not been to blame. Far from

²⁹ Maurice Andrieux, *Henri IV* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1955), 51.

³⁰ Robert J. Knecht, *Catherine De'Medici* (London: Longman, 1998), 89.

inciting violence, she seems to have attempted to stop it through the civilized means of a mutual discussion.

Edith Sichel, author of *Catherine De'Medici and the French Reformation*, represents what might be seen as an older historiographical explanation for the outbreak of the wars of religion that still sought to blame Catherine De'Medici. Sichel clearly traces the violence to the policies of the Queen Regent.³¹ Sichel goes on to portray Catherine De'Medici as unstable in her decisions and political maneuvers. As the violence unfolded throughout the 1560s, Sichel suggests that Catherine, "still dallied with orthodoxy, but showed that her sympathies were Protestant....And thus, between the sceptics and the heretics, it was easy to maintain an atmosphere of moderation round the throne as long as there was no conflict."³² Clearly, Knecht and Sichel present the researcher with very different views of this powerful Queen. The historian is thus left to determine which image is more correct and if Catherine's conciliatory policies fostered peace or war. It seems clear that Catherine was involved, perhaps even guilty of causing some of the violence. However, it appears that her motives lay more in the realm of renaissance practicality and principles of conciliation than in blind religious hatred.

Mack Holt represents a refreshing understanding of the origins of the Wars that stresses an interpretation that rests more in the social sciences. In his work, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, Holt argues for a historico-sociological understanding of the origin of the wars.³³ Holt attempts to view the wars of religion from the standpoint of the sixteenth century, rather than attempting to superimpose modern paradigms onto the past. Holt, being a thorough historian, does not rule out other causes, or possible origins, for the wars. He credits financial or class-based factors,

³¹ Edith Sichel, *Catherine De'Medici and the French Reformation* (London: Dawsons, 1969), 193.

³² Ibid, 199-200.

³³ Mack Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 2.

while allowing for the primacy of religious motivations.³⁴ Holt's approach is inherently holistic. It takes into account the fact that Early Modern societies, at least before the Enlightenment, were less individualistic than they subsequently became.

A historian that presents a more novel approach, Luc Racaut, in his work *Hatred in Print: Catholic propaganda and Protestant identity during the French Wars of Religion*, suggests that the reason why the violence of the Wars became so strong in its earlier phases was due, in large part, to what amounts to a propaganda campaign. The Catholic pamphleteers created a very negative view of the Huguenots and this, Racaut suggests, created a fertile ground for acts of violence to grow and spread. This point is interesting and tends to support the argument that the traditional networks and structures of power were willing to adopt new technologies (like printing and mass communication) to further a more regressive agenda.

N.M Sutherland provides the researcher with still another paradigm of interpretation. He suggests that Imperial Spain helped to cause the Wars.³⁵ This historical approach, if true, should call into question the other paradigms that this essay has discussed. The involvement of Spain and other major powers added an element infrequently mentioned in the corpus of scholarly literature surrounding the wars of religion.³⁶ J.H. Elliot supports this view when he suggests that Phillip II of Spain regarded the Protestants as hostile enemies in much the same way he viewed the Moors.³⁷

Denis Crouzet suggests, in his work *Dieu en ses royaumes: Une histoire des guerres de religion*, that there was an emotional aspect to the outbreak of the religious violence stemming from

³⁴ Ibid, 3.

³⁵ N.M Sutherland, "St. Bartholomew and the Problem of Spain," in *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents*, ed. Alfred Soman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974):15-24, 17.

³⁶ Warwick Ball, *The Sultans of Rome--The Turkish World Expansion* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2013), 128.

³⁷ J.H. Elliot, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (London: Penguin, 1963), 235.

the ways in which each side envisioned the 'other.'³⁸ Just how the various religious groups managed to co-exist, and the way in which Henri IV attempted, with the power of the Crown, to establish a more permanent peace, is the theme of Mark Greengrass' *France in the Age of Henri IV: The Struggle for Stability*.³⁹ Crouzet's work is more of a social history suggesting an emotive origin for the violence linked with a certain kind of envisioning that stimulated the wars. Greengrass provides the historian with a more survey-based approach that examines co-existence on the level of macro-history and the power of the state.

Some classic works dealing with the French Civil Wars also warrant attention. Lucien Febvre's *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, originally published in 1942, provides something of a psychologico-historical examination of the life and work of François Rabelais. His central argument is that the apparent skepticism in the works of Rabelais is a lens through which to view all skepticism in France during the 16th century. More controversially, he suggests that there was a certain *mentalité* within French society at the time that militated against disbelief or skepticism and that this, in turn, contributed to the hardening of confessional lines within the wars of religion. Natalie Zemon-Davis also explores the concept of belief and the sacred in her work "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth Century Lyons." She argues that the various processions, statues, and other religious customs of both Protestants and Catholics within 16th century France converted the cities into holy territory themselves.⁴⁰ This, if true, explains why the cities of France especially saw extreme violence surrounding religious issues. While all of these works are valuable to this study in that they explore in detail specific aspects of the Civil Wars, they

³⁸ Denis Crouzet, *Dieu en ses royaumes: Une histoire des guerres de religion* (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2008).

³⁹ Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV: The Struggle for Stability* (London: Longman, 1995).

⁴⁰ Natalie Zemon-Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-century Lyon," *Past and Present* 90, no. 1, (1981): 40-70.

do not answer the questions under investigation. These include the questions concerning a tripartite view of the country and society during the Civil Wars, and the expropriation of the new learning and approaches of the Renaissance into the ideological structures of each side.

The Saint Barthélemy, and the violence of the Wars of Religion, set a trajectory that contributed to making France what it is today. The ultimate origins of the violence remain tantalizingly vague within the corpus of the scholarly literature today. The *guerres* defy easy explanation and seem to escape tidy schemes of classification. Jouanna ends her book and this essay by saying, speaking of the violence of those troubled years, "*Ces phobias et ces angoisses, ces déformations du regard, ne sont-elles pas toujours prêtes à resurgir? C'est la question que pose encore aujourd'hui la tragédie du 24 août 1572.*"⁴¹ ("These phobias and anguish, these deformations of the point of view, are they not always ready to resurface?" Author's Translation.) The lessons of the religious violence of the Wars of Religion remain valid today and are worthy in their own right of study. France survived the wars, as history demonstrates. Nevertheless, the echoes of the battles of those distant years of war and bloodshed linger on in the pages of the history books more than four hundred years later. A study of individual humanists is invaluable in determining what humanism was and how it worked in the everyday lives of those who practiced its principles. It is also important to demonstrate the way in which humanism created a fundamental paradigm shift within Europe that tended to allow for a more secular, skeptical society. This applies both to people who were outside the boundaries of Europe (outsiders/non-Europeans) as well as to those who were within its borders (insiders/Europeans). Defining humanism is notoriously difficult. There is not a uniform definition that the scholar can impose upon the movement, the time, or the people that, together, formed the humanists and their age. One feature that appears to occur frequently within

⁴¹ Jouanna, *Saint Barthélemy*, 307.

the context of French and international humanism is that of a certain kind of secularity. This idea appears clearly in the works of Nancy Bisaha, who allows the reader to examine the way in which Renaissance humanist writers essentially created the view of the Islamic east that still exists today in *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*. Benoit Beaulieu's, *Visage Littéraire d'Erasmus* and Michael Baraz's *L'Être et la Connaissance selon Montaigne* provide insights into how two noted Renaissance humanists from the northern tradition created their work, literary style, and approached complex philosophical subjects like 'being' and 'knowledge.' Sarah Bakewell continues the study of Montaigne in her charming new text *How to Live or A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer*. Her work is complimented by Saul Frampton's enlightening text on Michel de Montaigne entitled *When I am Playing with My Cat, How Do I Know She is Not Playing with Me?* In concord with Bakewell, Frampton suggests that Montaigne moved from an essentially stoic philosophical view of life to one that was both not completely stoic and, in some ways, not entirely Christian. Life's goal is life itself, not death--this is Frampton's conclusion as to how Montaigne came to see life and live it. Both stoicism and Christianity, for Frampton, represent particular facets of Montaigne's unique approach to humanism. Lastly, Donald Frame's, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* further examines the way in which Montaigne abandoned Ciceronian stoicism to formulate a personal and deeply human approach to life.

The works dealing with Montaigne find an able companion in the work of Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France: 1560-1715*. This last work provides a scholarly and largely objective study of France during the Early Modern era, emphasizing the social development of the country during this period of the *ancien régime*. Briggs includes the devastating effects of the Protestant Reformation and *guerres de religion* on France, reminding the historian of the broader context of the time in

question. Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell demonstrate the mentality of the Reformation world in their text *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe*. The authors suggest that famine, war, disease and the rise of heresies contributed to the general expectation that the apocalypse was fast approaching. The wars in France, in which much of the country was devastated and the fabric of the state was badly torn, can fit into this paradigm. King Henri IV ended the wars in France at least. Maurice Andrieux's *Henri IV* is a classic biography of this Renaissance monarch written from the French perspective. Richard Dunn's *The Age of Religious War* balances this biography, providing a clear and well-researched study of how the religious wars developed not only in France but also in the rest of Europe. James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* provides a comprehensive view of how at least one major western European kingdom organized itself during this period.

Marguerite de Navarre represents humanism as expressed by a highly educated woman. Patricia F. Cholakian, and Rouben C. Cholakian's, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* helps the historian to understand her role in the French humanist movement and incorporates the important contribution of women to the Renaissance itself. Virginia Cox continues the theme of female humanists contributing to the movement and the intellectual development of Europe in her study of *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance*. Of related interest, in this section, is Bruce E. Hays' study of Rabelaisian literature and its historic roots in *Rabelais's Radical Farce*. He suggests that the calm, same kind of rational humanism that one finds in earlier and later writers like Navarre, Montaigne, and Erasmus is present also in Rabelais underneath a surface veneer taken from the traditional French medieval farce.

The state of the scholarly literature suggests that, despite much research into the question of the French civil wars, the general approach is to divide France into two opposing camps, Catholic

and Protestant (at its most basic level). This division, as useful as it may be for scholarship and educational purposes, leaves many questions unanswered. It ignores the complexities of religious affiliation undergirding the wars. It also overlooks the important role of the humanists who sought a third way between the two warring parties.

This essay will attempt to move towards answers to various important questions about the era. For example, through a prosopological examination of the lives of various French men and women of the time, one can move toward a greater understanding of what the historical condition of France was during the sixteenth century. Their lives, and even more importantly, their thoughts, recording for posterity in journals, letters, and other written texts, give us a rare glimpse into the minds of those who acted in this great drama. This essay will also help to shed light on the issue of the union of religion and politics in France during the sixteenth century. To what extent were they united for both the Royalist Catholics and the Genevan Reformed? Crucial for the purposes of this work, is the examination of how extensively the various ideologies of the three parties suggested here find reflection in the journals and personal writings of these important actors?

II. Etienne de la Boetie, Humanism, and the Middle Way

This chapter covers a historical time-frame that spans the years 1492, the birth of Marguerite de Navarre, until 1611 and the death of Pierre de l'Estoile, two notable figures, of several, that participated and helped to constitute the *middle way*. This timeframe constitutes what, for the purposes of this essay, represents the 'long sixteenth century.' This essay as a whole will, however, end somewhat earlier. The Édit de Nantes, promulgated in 1598 by the Huguenot turned Catholic king, Henri IV, ended the *guerres de religion* and provided a framework for peace, tolerance, and rebuilding a torn and ravaged France.

For France and much of Europe, these years set the pattern for centuries of national development. Not only did Humanism continue as a major intellectual force within Europe, but the Reformation began; Spain, Portugal, England, and France began to establish overseas empires in the new world; and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation split into camps, Protestant and Catholic, that in time became armed conflict. The world was changing as many challenged old orthodoxies and, throughout Europe, Catholics and Calvinists vied for control of several countries, including France, the Low Countries, and Scotland. By 1598, when Henri IV issued the *Édit de Nantes*, it stated something remarkable regarding the Huguenots, specifically, it guaranteed to them "...la liberté de leurs consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes..."⁴² Simultaneously, the *édit* restored Catholicism wherever its practice had been suppressed.⁴³ This was not at all the approach taken to the warring parties in the wars of religion for the nearly forty years of constant strife and violence that had passed. This rather pacific settlement, based in reason and on a more

⁴² "Édit de Nantes (1598)," *Musée Virtuel du Protestantisme*, <http://www.museeprotestant.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Mus%C3%A9-virtuel-du-protestantisme-%C3%89dit-de-Nantes.pdf>.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 4.

secular understanding of life and the world came from the humanists who made up the third way between the Huguenot radicals on the one hand, and the Royalist Catholic reactionaries on the other.

Those who were involved in the *middle way*, were not an isolated group with sharply defined boundaries. Unlike modern political parties, the humanists of France were linked by not only a similar education and philosophy, but they also formed a network that stood, in many ways, at the heart of kingdom. They were the pivot point upon which the other, more radical, sides balanced. A network existed throughout France of likeminded people, men and women, rich and poor, cleric and lay, who, in many cases, knew each other, or of each other. They exchanged writings, correspondence, and communication; and provided shelter to representatives of all three of the major warring factions, Catholic and Protestant alike.

Born in Sarlat, Étienne de la Boetie (1530-1563) was a writer and philosopher whose words deeply influenced the thought of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). He lived only 33 years—a short life span. Yet his works, philosophy, and above all friendship lived on in the memory and writings of Montaigne. Amongst the many documents that Boetie wrote, one stands as a kind of sixteenth century humanist manifesto. Boetie's short treatise entitled *Discours sur la Servitude Voluntaire* is a call to arms, an appeal to fight and conquer through passive disobedience. Boetie muses over what causes one tyrannical individual to have total sway over the masses. What causes the oppressed masses to submit, year after year, to this authority? Boetie asks the central question around which the work is organized: why do people cooperate with tyrants? He writes,

Pour le moment, je voudrais seulement comprendre comment il se peut que tant d'hommes, tant de bourgs, tant de villes, tant de nations supportent quelquefois un tyran seul qui n'a de puissance que celle qu'ils lui donnent, qui n'a pouvoir de leur nuire qu'autant qu'ils veulent bien l'endurer, et qui ne pourrait leur faire aucun mal s'ils n'aimaient mieux tout souffrir de lui que de le contredire. Chose vraiment étonnante—et pourtant si commune qu'il faut plutôt en gémir que s'en ébahir-, de voir un million

d'hommes misérablement asservis, la tête sous le joug, non qu'ils y soient contraints par une force majeure, mais parce qu'ils sont fascinés et pour ainsi dire ensorcelés par le seul nom d'un, qu'ils ne devraient pas redouter—puisqu'il est seul—ni aimer—puisqu'il est envers eux tous inhumain et cruel. Telle est pourtant la faiblesse des hommes: contraints à l'obéissance, obligés de temporiser...Si donc une nation, contrainte par la force des armes, est soumise au pouvoir d'un seul—comme la cite d'Athènes le fut à la domination des trente tyrans--, il ne faut pas s'étonner qu'elle serve, mais bien le déplorer. Ou plutôt, ne s'en étonner ni ne s'en plaindre, mais supporter le Malheur avec patience, et se réserver pour un avenir meilleur.⁴⁴

(Translation: For the moment, I would only like to understand how it can be that so many men, so many towns, so many cities, so many nations endure sometimes one single tyrant who has no power except that which they give him, who has no power to harm them but that which they are willing to endure, and who would not be able to do them any harm if they wouldn't rather suffer it all rather than contradict him. This is truly a stunning thing—and nevertheless so common that it makes more sense to moan than to be amazed--to see a million men, reduced to abject servitude, their heads in the yoke, not that they are constrained by a greater force, but because they are fascinated, or to say more clearly, bewitched by the single name of one man, that they ought not to fear—because he is just one man—nor love—since he is cruel and inhuman to all. Such is, however, the weakness of men: constrained to obedience, forced to stall...If therefore a nation, constrained by force of arms, is submitted to the power of a single man—as the city of Athens was during the time of the domination of the thirty tyrants--we must not be astonished that it serves, but rather we must deplore the fact. Or rather, neither to be stunned nor to bemoan the fact, but endure the unhappiness with patience, and wait for a better future. Author's translation)

These powerful words set the stage for the grand question that Boetie then raises dealing with the primary theme of the work.

⁴⁴ Etienne de la Boetie, "Discours de la Servitude Volontaire," *Singulier*. Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://www.singulier.eu/textes/reference/texte/pdf/servitude.pdf>.

As the work moves into the central argument, Boetie marvels:

Mais, ô Grand Dieu, qu'est donc cela? Comment appellerons-nous ce malheur? Quel est ce vice, ce vice horrible, de voir un nombre infini d'hommes, non seulement obéir, mais servir, non pas être gouvernés, mais être tyrannisés, d'ayant ni biens, ni parents, ni enfants, ni leur vie même qui soient à eux? De les voir souffrir...les paillardises, les cruautés, non d'une armée...mais d'un seul!⁴⁵

(Translation: "What, O Great God, is this? What can we call this unhappiness? What is this vice, this horrible vice, to see an infinite number of men, not only obey but service, not just be governed but to be tyrannized, having neither goods nor family nor children nor their own lives that are really theirs? To see them suffer... the degeneracy, the cruelties, not of an army...but of only one!" Author's translation.)

Boetie's amazement at such a state of affairs continues to grow until suddenly there is an epiphany. He reasons that the tyrant who holds the masses in servitude and slavery will defeat himself if the people simply withhold support. Boetie puts it this way: "*Or ce tyran seul, il n'est pas besoin de le combattre, ni de l'abattre. Il est défait de lui-même, pourvu que le pays ne consente point à sa servitude. Il ne s'agit pas de lui ôter quelque chose, mais de ne rien lui donner.*"⁴⁶

(Translation: Now, this one tyrant, it is not necessary to combat him or to strike him down. He defeats himself if the country does not consent at all to his servitude. It is not a question of taking something away from him, but simply of giving him nothing. Author's translation.)

⁴⁵ Ibid, 3-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 4.

This represents the essence of revolt in the manner of the humanists: it represents the humanist aversion to war, a sentiment expressed, as an example, in the writings of Erasmus.⁴⁷ It is idealistic. There is no call to the form an organized side; neither is there a call to overthrow kings and empires through warfare. Boetie argued instead for a reasoned, rational, and above all, calm withdrawal of support from a tyrannical regime—a retreat inwards towards self-reflection and intellectual communion with the great authors of pagan and Christian antiquity. This is a handbook for humanist revolutionaries.

Boetie may have written this piece in the late 1540s (1548/9) in response to the emerging conflict between Catholics and Protestants within France. This period covered the end of the reign of François I, the brief reign of François II, and then the beginning of the much longer, and more resolutely warlike, rule of Henri II. Until Boetie's death in 1563, the piece remained unpublished, read only by friends, passed from individual to individual.⁴⁸ Publication came following his death. Between the end of the 1540s and the early 1560s, the Crown moved decisively towards a centralizing form of power supported by the power of the Catholic Church.

In the late 1540s, Boetie saw signs that indicated a non-humanist approach emanating from the intertwined pillars of French politico-religious power, the Crown and the Catholic Church. These two gave legitimacy and power to the other. The power and authority of the French Crown and Church depended upon a faith-based acceptance of their dogmas and decrees. This stands in opposition to the humanist movement. Doubt, or at least skepticism, lay at the heart of humanism, especially concerning received tradition, religious or political. Boetie was in

⁴⁷ Erasmus notes in his *Adages*, “War is approved by the young and inconsiderate...” (135); and “‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison.’ One man’s loss is another’s gain, or one makes a fortune by the ruin of another: this is universally the case in war, and not unfrequently in law likewise”

Erasmus, *Adages*, ed. Robert Bland (London: Military Library, 1814), 168.

⁴⁸ “Le *Discours de la Servitude volontaire* est le seul des ouvrages de La Boetie parvenus jusqu’à nous, dont nous ne devons pas la conservation à Montaigne.” (The *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* is the only one of the works of de La Boetie that has come to us, which is not indebted to the preservation of Montaigne.” Etienne de la Boetie, *Oeuvres Complètes d’Estienne de la Boetie*, Léon Feugère, ed. (Paris: Jules de la Lain, 1846), 3.

a good position to observe how French society was unfolding not only because he was well educated but also because, being a *conseiller du roy*, he was part of the larger network of royal power.⁴⁹ He also came from a family of good standing within the community, his uncle being a member of the local *parlement*. He was, in short, highly educated, focused on law, service to the king, and humanist values, and moved in circles of largely likeminded individuals, such as Montaigne.

The question of humanist values, mentioned above, raises an important question: what exactly was humanism? It is difficult to define because it is a vast, complex phenomenon. Despite this, it represents a relatively simple return to Greco-Roman literary and linguistic antecedents. Bard Thompson suggests a tri-partite definition of the Renaissance and by extension, of humanism. Briefly, classicism, historical discontinuity, and humanism—interpreted as recognizing the value of human life and the physical world—form the basis for his conception of the entire Renaissance movement. As Thompson expresses it:

First, the Renaissance profoundly revered classical antiquity...The classical value of proportion, harmony, rationality, and regularity became not simply axioms of life but the almost universal norms of excellence...Second, the Renaissance viewed history as discontinuous...[P]eople of the Renaissance preferred to dissociate themselves completely from their medieval forebears...They disdained the immediate past in preference for a distant past. Third, the Renaissance adopted a thoroughgoing humanism. Through almost every expression of Renaissance culture...runs a clear affirmation of human dignity, freedom, and potential. Nothing more distinguishes the Renaissance in all its parts than humanism.⁵⁰

This definition provides a concise summation of the program of the Renaissance humanists that, in time, transformed Europe, laying the foundations for the modern worldview.

⁴⁹ Ibid, viii.

⁵⁰ Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Eerdmans: Cambridge, 1996), 39.

The *Édit de Nantes* that ended the cycle of wars, referenced above, is a part of this more modern worldview also in that it allowed a degree of tolerance for both of the warring sides in the conflict. It also, tacitly, recognized the essential humanity of both. The key component of this definition, and of the *Édit*, is the value ascribed to 'human dignity, freedom, and potential.' The assumption that all human beings, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation, share a fundamental value requires latitude of mind—one that transcends traditional cultural or sectarian views. This point also helps to answer one of the questions posed at the beginning of this essay, dealing with the degree to which religion and politics were joined. While most, if not all, of the major humanist writers of sixteenth century France were affiliated with Christianity in some way, they did not, in their personal writings, tend to link the two to the same degree as did the Huguenots or the Royalist/Catholic party. The creation of a secular space was a novelty for France at the time and would, by the close of the Civil War era and the reign of Henri IV (1589-1610), produce the *politique* party and a solution that would end the wars and religious persecution until the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1598).

The central argument this essay proposes regarding the 'Middle Way' within the French Wars of religion is that the members of this group found unity in the values, attitudes, and approaches of humanism. They were willing to grant a certain level of toleration to those who disagreed with their religious point of view, without demanding absolute conformity to either religious camp, Catholic and/or Protestant. Humanism, in other words, was the driving force in the early stages of the Civil Wars in forming the moderate side, out of which emerged the *politiques* by the early/mid 1560s. The presence of a humanist education, broadly speaking, appears to have produced this, arguably, more tolerant mindset. The basis of this tolerance was

not rooted in an abstract idea of relativity, philosophical or religious, but rather upon the assumption of a shared, universal humanity.

Europe was changing both in terms of the metaphysical understanding that it held of itself and of the outside world. Old realities, which may have been taken for granted during previous centuries such as the primacy of the Catholic religion, the assumption that there were only three continents, meaning Asia, Africa, and Europe, the absolute centrality of the biblical narrative regarding the fundamental realities of humankind--these certainties were under assault by the new learning and discoveries of the Renaissance. This phenomenon of change seems to have triggered, or at least existed simultaneously with, a desire for certainty, meaning paradigms of analysis and interpretation that would not change and, thereby, give Europe solid ground—or so they thought—in a world whose cosmology was rapidly changing.

The humanists allowed a model to develop that permitted secular space to emerge—even if this process took several centuries to evolve. An example of this is the way in which humanists dealt with the traditional enemy of Christian Europe, the Ottoman Turks. The humanists were able to separate religious creed from people and allow a uniquely non-sectarian space that, though not without flaws and residual prejudices, nonetheless permitted a more neutral discussion of the Ottomans.⁵¹ This is not to suggest that the humanists were tolerant in a modern way. The humanist legacy is ambiguous—at the same time bigoted and ethno/religio-centric as well as containing within it the possibility of leaving polemic behind and taking the world on its own terms. The central point, for the purposes of this essay, is the idea of secularity within society, independent from religious space. This is the ideological center of the French Middle

⁵¹ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 187.

Way between the clashing Royalist/Catholics and Huguenots. Boetie himself, while a Christian, was a convinced humanist and seems to argue for an ideology that goes beyond sect, confession, and faith. His ideology roots itself in classical norms, secularism, and reason.

For a certain time the Church in France fostered the humanist movement by supporting new translations of the Bible into French and new ideas in theology. Calls to purify the clergy and rid the people of the remains of paganism and superstition abounded in France, led by dynamic men and women like Bishop Briçonnet of Meaux, Erasmus, Guillaume Budé, and Queen Marguerite de Navarre. At heart, however, the teachings and practices of the Church, underneath this polished, 'modern' surface, remained essentially untouched and reactionary.

A fundamental opposition existed within sixteenth century France: Catholic/Royalists and Protestant/Huguenots. The divisions, as well as the similarities, between the two were clear. Both were convinced of their correctness and that there was only one way to understand God, humanity, society, and the church. The implications for society were vast in that both stood for some issues that represented polar opposites—though not in all possible ways. The various parties involved sowed the seeds of discord then ripening for conflict between these groups. By the reign of Henri II, the tensions were mounting. Between groups was a third way, a moderate side that advocated for change and reform while simultaneously maintaining adherence to the traditional structures of society. This group was, more than anything else, humanist. Their program was one of societal reform through proper (humanist) education, a relative kind of tolerance (for the time), and believed that the best reform was gradual, avoiding any call for radical revolution. Humanism also tended to move away from the establishment of doctrinal constructs that the Crown and church imposed upon society as a whole. It was this in particular that they tended to avoid. Disobedience for the humanists, then, was the passive withdrawal of

support and the cloaking of calls for moderate, tolerant reform behind a veil of outward conformity to the established regime. The common link between all of the members of this group is that of a humanist education—for whether they adhered to the Catholic or the Calvinist religious groups, they shared a prior commitment to humanism and the new learning of the Renaissance. The same kinds of themes appear in all of their writings. There is a tendency to recoil at the sectarian violence of the civil wars coupled with the refusal to take sides. They show a willingness to befriend those who were of the ‘other side’ and above all the very *Montaignesque* belief that the problem in France at the time lay in trying to construct structures of absolute truth and impose those onto all of society. This group did not possess an army; neither did it try to overtake the government. It *did* however try to sway the opinion of, at least, the educated classes, through their various writings and, just as importantly, in the way in which they lived their lives.

Etienne de la Boetie helped to set a particular standard for the way in which humanists within the French context approached the questions of tyranny, extremism, violence, religion, and war. The central concept was withdrawal of support and an intellectual refusal to take sides publicly. The humanists tended also to approach calls for reform in a muted, often disguised way. Marguerite de Navarre, sister of François I and queen of Navarre, demonstrates both the origins of the middle way that I am seeking to establish in the sixteenth century French context and a similar approach to life as taken by Boetie. Her calls for reform included not only religious reformation but also a disguised call for a change of the essential roles between the sexes.

Marguerite had received a humanist education as a child and, subsequently, she maintained her loyalty to the traditional power structures of French government and society while working for reform through her activities and writings. She could carry on a lively

correspondence with the Pope while sheltering Huguenot writers and thinkers like Clement Marot. In this section, I do not seek to deal with Marguerite as a literary figure. Instead, I am suggesting that she represents one of the earlier representatives of the third way that began to divide France with the advent of the Reformation. She was not alone in this regard but rather part of a larger movement that could well be termed *humanist*. Out of this side, the later *politique* side arose. This *third way* that I am proposing advocated moderate reform in the state as well as the church, retaining many of the outward symbols of the old order but the substance of the new changes of the Renaissance. They did not necessarily urge the construction of a powerful, even absolute, royal authority.

This is apparent when we examine several facts from the time. The humanists, characterized by their drive *ad fontes*, demanded a study of the original Greek and Hebrew texts of Scripture rather than, from their point of view, the corrupt Vulgate version of the Bible. They stressed the simpler, individual piety of the *devotio moderna* as opposed to the elaborate and possibly corrupt local practices centering on the saints, Mary, and local religious festivals. They protested against the selling of Church offices that had its origins, at least partly, in the Concordat of Bologna (1516).⁵² They identified many of the areas in need of reform that the leaders of the reformation pointed to as well. This helps to show the link between the humanists and the reformers, many of whom were humanist scholars in their own right.

Marguerite supported the work of Bishop Bricconnet and his circle of humanist scholars at Meaux, a group suspected of having Huguenot tendencies. While maintaining the role of queen, wife, mother, and sister to the King, Marguerite adopted much of the substance of the change that was then emerging in France. She challenged the ancient understanding of women, their

⁵² Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France: 1560-1715* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), 5.

role in society and the family, and asserted a certain kind of individualism that makes her a memorable figure, breaking with the past. More importantly, Marguerite remained a member of the Roman Catholic Church and loyal to the Crown. At the same time, she sheltered and supported not only the humanist scholars of Meaux, but also Huguenot partisans. Her writings also demonstrate a tendency to favor some of the suggestions for reform made by the Protestants. She maintained the traditional symbolism of the time while, in other words, adopting much of the substance of the new learning. She is thus an early example of the middle way.

How did she accomplish these challenges? By following a path similar de la Boetie, i.e. one of passive resistance, expressed in cloaked ways through literature, especially. Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church taught that women were the ‘seed-bed,’ into which the husband implanted the homunculus (fetus), and who, in turn, tended to the child, husband, and other domestic duties, always obedient to male authority. In contrast to the more daring literature of Marguerite de Navarre, it is instructive to see the work of an anonymous male author of the 15th century and the collection of short stories known as *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*. This work asserts the traditional role of men and women--the male as pursuing and seducing the wives of neighbors, while the woman acquiesces. She thus maintains very much the role of a subordinate to the (male) lover and to the husband. The clever male lover tends, in many of the stories, to outwit the female, succeeding in seducing her despite her better intentions, fooling the husband, and escaping the consequences. Marriage and the marital embrace were for the sake of procreation; women needed no education. Men pursued and enjoyed sex for its own sake; women resisted and attempted to remain ‘pure.’⁵³ Marguerite de Navarre, a woman herself,

⁵³ Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, “The Other Voice in early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series,” in *Louise Labé: Complete Poetry and Prose, A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Deborah Lesko Baker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), xv-xvi.

turned all of this upside down. She was intelligent, well educated, and passionate. Many of the stories of her famous *Heptameron* deal with love, romance, sex, and passion from the female point of view. The story of *Floride and Amador* is a prime example. Challenged by fellow travelers when stranded by a rainstorm in the Pyrenees, the narrator, Parlemente (perhaps a representation of Marguerite herself) tells a story that is supposed to demonstrate the traditional idea of a woman faithful in love. Parlemente takes a different approach to this challenge. Marguerite turns the old understanding on its head and tells a story in which the reader sees fidelity from the standpoint of the *female* rather than the male. Summing up the story, Saffredent, one of the travelers in the circle of storytellers, remarks, “They have honor, just as men...have honor.”⁵⁴ Her recognition of equality between the sexes is reflective of the break with the past in Marguerite’s work.

Not only did Marguerite take an active role as a poet, author, and humanist scholar, she also became involved in the call to reform the traditional Church. Deeply pious, she had learned much from Catholic humanists like Bishop Bricconnet, but also from the Protestant movement growing throughout Europe and France—showing again the way in which many of the prominent humanists of the reformation era in France found themselves at the center of a web of connectivity that linked both of the more extreme sides of the conflict. Her poem *Le Miroir de l’Ame Pecheresse* (The Mirror of the Sinful Soul), shows deep protestant tendencies and themes.⁵⁵ The Sorbonne condemned the poem precisely because of its reformist tendencies. She gave support and refuge to notable Huguenots, such as Clément Marot, and was a friend and

⁵⁴ Marguerite De Navarre, *L’Heptameron* (Paris: Benoist Prevost, 1560), 84.

⁵⁵ “In her theological poem *Le Miroir de l’Ame Pecheresse*, she describes herself engaging in meaningless rituals in the days before she understood the true meaning of the Gospels...”
 Patricia F. Cholakian and Rouben C. Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia, 2006), 50. See also, Marguerite de Navarre, *Miroir de l’ame pécheresse* (Lyon: Pierre de Tours, 1549).

correspondent of Jean Calvin himself for many years. Yet, despite this, the Vatican respected her deeply and she received warm regards from the Pope.⁵⁶

Marguerite had adopted the substance of the new learning, but not its outward symbolism. She remained loyal to the traditional Church and Crown, working to reform the ecclesiastical and societal structures from within. Her willingness to work against the received traditional views of society—even if it threatened the essential order of society—implies a certain level of insistence upon the importance of the individual. In this, she clearly echoes the humanist attitudes of Etienne de la Boetie and his humanist approach to life, revolt, tyranny, and the call for reform.

The assertion of the role of the individual, the adoption of the substance of the new learning, if not reform's outward symbolism, and a clear humanist approach, is evident in the writings of François Rabelais, another writer and early proponent of the *middle way* which Marguerite de Navarre sheltered and protected. While much earthier than the refined Boetie, Rabelais worked in ways similar to the philosopher of Bourdeaux and to the Queen of Navarre. She, in turn, was a great influence upon Rabelais who, in later years, showed his gratitude by dedicating the *Tiers Livre* of his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to her. Like Marguerite and Boetie, François Rabelais received an education that was both traditional and humanist. Priest, doctor, and scholar, Rabelais believed in the reform of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of the French humanist movement, the establishment of a Gallican Church, and support of Royal

⁵⁶ “Two letters from Pope Paul III prove that Marguerite continued to be highly regarded by the Vatican. In the first, the pontiff thanked her for her zealous support of the church and assured her that he relied on her cooperation and helpful intercessions. In the second, he solicited her aid in combating the current ‘heresies’ in England. Together they are confirmation that she continued to be considered a faithful daughter of the church in Rome, if not in Paris.” Cholakian and Cholakian, 190.

authority over against the external control exerted by the Popes.⁵⁷ His most famous work, *The Five Books of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, describes the life of the giants. At the beginning of his work, Rabelais describes his works as small, grotesque, medicine boxes that, despite their ugly and old-fashioned outward appearance, contain valuable medicines that are for the good of humankind.⁵⁸ What was his meaning? Rabelais grasped the substance of the reforms then sweeping Europe but remained outwardly loyal to existing ecclesiastical authorities. This is clear from the fact that he cloaked his stringent criticisms of the state of affairs in France of his day behind the guise of a fantastic story and the fact that he never abandoned the traditionalist side for the Reformed movement in France. Now it is possible to understand the imagery of the medicine boxes: underneath a grotesque appearance, there was a new and healthy commodity. The substance of reform is here. The humanist call for change that worked within existing structures was present, just as it was in Navarre. The outward symbols, represented by the medicine boxes, remained the same. This outward symbolism reflects the fact that Rabelais did not, like the Huguenot, call for a reform that destroyed the traditional society around him. This links him with both Marguerite de Navarre, and Boetie in terms of their similar approach to the difficulties growing throughout France and the network that they formed.

Rabelais supports the cause of those humanists who tended to work for reform within (not necessarily identical with the Protestants) throughout his work. He attacks the traditional practices and beliefs of the Sorbonne and the Roman Catholic Church of his day. This appears most notably in attacking the abuse of the Papal Decretals in Book IV, chapters 45-53. He dislikes the uneducated and rote way in which the priests and monks mumbled through their

⁵⁷ André La Garde and Laurent Michard, *XVI Siècle: Les Grands Auteurs Français du Programme* (Paris: Bordas, 1970), 35.

⁵⁸ Francois, Rabelais, *The Five Books of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. Jacques LeClercq (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 3.

prayers in book I, chapter XL, as well as making fun of pilgrims and pilgrimages in book I, chapter XXXVIII. These last represented a key part of Medieval Roman Catholic piety. As Pantagruel is about to go into battle against armed giants in Book II, chapter XXIX, he prays,

If then it please Thee to succor me in the hour of peril, I do offer up a vow. In Utopia and in all lands over which I may hold power and sway, I will cause Thy holy gospel to be purely, simply and entirely preached. And I will blot out the abuses of a rabble of ranters, popemongers and false prophets who, by human fabrications and depraved subterfuges, have poisoned the world we live in. Then there was heard a voice from heaven, saying: 'Hoc fac et vinces....'⁵⁹

This is an evangelical call to a purified proclamation of the Christian message, over against the older practices of the traditional church. The call to reform, however, was cloaked, placed in the mouths of grotesque and humorous figures, allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions about the issue to hand as well as the ultimate intent of the author.

Through his characters, Rabelais throws off the restraints of the old order, and exerts his own voice and opinions against the abuses he perceived in the Church of his day. He adopted the substance of the new understanding, including the role and importance of the individual, but remained loyal to the outward forms--the symbolism of traditionalism was still in place. The similarity between the life and work of Marguerite de Navarre, Boetie, and François Rabelais cannot be coincidental. All three, at least, maintained their outward allegiance to the Crown; all advocated reforms that were religious, political, and individual; to make their recommendations and critiques, they used stories, parables, and exaggeration thus protecting themselves from the anger of the Crown and the royal regime. Most importantly, they appear as early advocates of the movement that the scholar can label the middle way. This third way went between the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 269.

reactionary Crown and the radical Huguenots and is different from the Catholic humanist tradition of writers like Lefevre-d'Étaple or Guillaume Budé who remained loyal to the theological positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional order of French society. It also predates the *politique* side that arose later during the Wars of Religion. The humanists cloaked their call for a kind of revolution in the fashion of Boetie, not overtly, as it was in the case of the Genevan Reformed.

This essay argues that the humanist Middle Way maintained outward conformity to the established order while calling for reform in disguised way—the method employed by Etienne de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, and François Rabelais. This method also appears in the life and works of Jean Bodin, the great thinker and legal scholar of sixteenth century France. The publication of *The Six Books of the Republic* is also a humanist protest against the *status quo* of French society, and very much a call for a middle way. The Crown, perhaps in a way that reflected a stream of Renaissance thought embodied by Niccolò Macchiavelli, was acting for the benefit and maintenance of its own power, regardless of the cost—the end of maintaining power justified the brutal means pursued to keep that power intact. This represented one extreme. On the other end of the spectrum, the Calvinist doctrines tended to favor social levelling, and an equality of men as they stood in relation to the deity. Bodin steered a course that attempted to pass between these two. Looking back at some of his earlier works it is clear that Bodin did not favor impositions upon the individual conscience in religious terms. His abhorrence of the dogmatism of Catholic orthodoxy was matched by his apparent revulsion to Calvinist dogmatism—both religious groups willing to kill in the name of religious faith; both willing to impose their versions of orthodoxy upon the individual conscience. Bodin appears to have rejected both for the same reason. While his writings, therefore, called for actions that were, in a

sense, revolutionary, he was willing to work within the system, never calling for either war against Protestantism nor for the destruction of the traditional French state. He fits the definition of the 'Middle Way' that this essay has established, and demonstrates, in the same way as Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, and Rabelais, the way in which the humanists stood at the middle of a spectrum within French society attempting to argue for an equilibrium based on reason and humanity.

Bodin overturned many of the commonly accepted norms and values of his day. He rejected the idea of absolute religious conformity, slavery, and the idea of a monarch who was only responsible to God. One may even infer that there is, in Bodin's philosophy, the anticipation of both the ideas of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* as well as the idea of the social contract found in later writers like Locke and Rousseau. The key point to note is the fact that Bodin's *Six Books* is itself a humanist, revolutionary act: he withdrew support from a reactionary monarchy that sought to impose an ideological, even totalitarian, regime upon France as well as opposing the socially revolutionary Huguenots who, in their own way, attempted the same thing as the Crown. Bodin shares a philosophical base with thinkers like Marguerite de Navarre and François Rabelais. He also shares a great deal in common with his contemporary writer and essayist, Michel de Montaigne. This latter anticipates some aspects of what became modernity, that unique blend of existential introspection, skepticism, and questioning that later would become the norm. Bodin, too, anticipates through his *Six Books* the development of the modern authoritarian and secular nation-state as well as the concept of the sovereignty of peoples. In this Bodin, not the forces of the Crown or the radical Huguenots, would foreshadow modernity. He also clearly reflects the humanist tradition of Etienne de la Boetie—his work does not call for a radical revolution or the overthrow of the French government, nor of the structures that

undergirded it. Nonetheless, his suggestions, when examined against the background of his time, represent a cloaked call for reform, very much in the tradition of Boetie. This would link him with the great humanists of the past like Pico Della Mirandola as well as the the *politiques* at the end of the sixteenth century and the 1598 *Édit de Nantes*.

A closer examination of Bodin's writing will demonstrate that he, too, represents one of the high points of the ideology of the 'Middle Way' that I propose. Balancing past and present, scholastic and humanist, Bodin is able to analyze current problems within France while not calling for outright rebellion or the violent overthrow of the traditional order. His philosophy would serve to undergird much of what would become the *politique* side that would, in the person of Henri IV, end the Civil Wars and restore order and, above all, strong central government to France. The *politique* party, which came to the fore especially after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of August, 1572, emerged largely from among the ranks of the humanists that contributed to the *middle way*, earlier in the century.

Bodin's theories were new, yet rooted in his study of classical antiquity—a tendency to centralize power in the kingdom around the figure of a paternalistic monarch. Bodin roots the well-being of the commonwealth in the structure of the family. The proper ordering of the family will mirror and give rise to the proper ordering of the state. It is clear that, for Bodin, the state is still an organic body, echoing the more traditional idea inherited from the Middle Ages of the society as an organic whole with the king at its head. Despite this similarity with the past, Bodin moves in a direction that is modern and quietly revolutionary. He writes, "*...la Republique est un droit gouvernement de plusieurs familles...avec puissance souveraine: aussi la famille est un droit gouvernement de plusieurs sujets sous l'obéissance d'un chef de famille, et de ce qui lui*

est propre...”⁶⁰ (Translation: ...the Republic is a legal government of many families...with sovereign power: also the family is a legal government with several subjects under the obedience of the head of the family and that which is his own...). The power of the father, absolute in the Roman system, served as the basis for the model of royal power within the state.

Also revolutionary is the degree of power that Bodin was willing to give the people of the commonwealth. Bodin was not in favor of absolute autocracy. He notes that “*Mais outre la souveraineté, il faut qu’il y ait quelque chose de comun, et de public: comme le domaine public, le tresor public, le pourpris de la cite, des rues, les murailles, les places, les temples, les marches, ...et autres choses semblables ...car ce n’est pas republique, s’il n’y a rien de public*” (Translation: But besides sovereign power there must also be something common, and public such as the public domain, public treasury, the buildings used by the whole community, roads, walls, squares, churches, markets ... and other similar things...for there is no commonwealth if nothing is public. (Author’s translation)”)⁶¹ The proper commonwealth, then, according to Bodin, is a social contract. It represents a partnership between ruler and ruled, Crown and commoners held in tension and balance. This kind of political theory is new for the time in which Bodin lived.

This continues in his attitude towards slavery that also challenged the accepted norms of his time. After discussing all of the traditional, inherited wisdom stretching back to Aristotle that supported slavery as a ‘natural’ institution, Bodin reviews these and concludes, “I would confess that servitude is natural where the strong, brutal, rich, and ignorant obey the wise, prudent, and humble, poor though they may be. Who wouldn’t say that to subject wise men to fools, the well-

⁶⁰ Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la Republique* (Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1577), 11-12.

⁶¹ Ibid, 10.

informed to the ignorant, saints to sinner is against nature...”⁶² The germ of the idea of the social contract, and a more modern approach to the rejection of slavery, these, for the time, were a call for reform in a reasoned, balanced and quiet humanist fashion.

Bodin roots the existence of the state itself in the disharmony and violence of humanity.

This conclusion is not based upon revelation but, rather, on reason. Bodin writes

La raison et lumière naturelle, nous conduit à cela, de croire que la force et violence a donné source et origine aux Républiques. Et quand la raison ny seroit point, j’ay monster cy dessus par le tesmoignage indubitable des plus veritables historiens, c’est à scavoir de Tucidide, Plutarque, Caesar, et mesme des loix de Solon; que les premiers hommes n’avoient point d’honneur, et de vertu plus grande, que de tuer, massacre, voler, ou asservir les hommes...Mais encores, avons nous le tesmoignage de l’histoire sacree...⁶³

“Reason and common sense alike point to the conclusion that the origin and foundation of the commonwealth was in force and violence. If this is not enough, it can be shown on the testimony of such historians as Thucydides, Plutarch, Caesar, and even by the laws of Solon, that the first generation of men were unacquainted with the sentiments of honor, and their highest endeavor was to kill, torture, rob, and enslave their fellows...We also have the evidence of sacred history...(Author’s Translation).”

In addition, while the common political orthodoxy of the time insisted on the primacy of the aristocracy, Bodin, on the other hand, turns this upside down. Appealing, in a characteristically humanist fashion, to examples from antiquity, he insists that,

⁶² Ibid, 36

⁶³ Ibid, 50. In this brief quote, Bodin links reason with history and then includes Revelation. This is a quintessential humanist approach that makes reason the lens through which all is viewed, including religion—an inversion, in other words, of the more traditional, faith-based order.

...quant à ce qu'il dit que les nobles font toujours plus citoyens que les roturiers, nous voyons tout le contraire ès Republique populaires de Suisse, où les nobles n'on part aucune (en qualité de nobles) aux offices. Plutarque a mieux dit, que droit de bourgeoisie est avoir part aux droits, et privilegees d'une cité, qui se doit entendre selon la condition et qualité d'un chacun, les nobles comme nobles, les roturiers comme roturiers, et les femmes et enfans en cas pareil selon l'age, sexe, condition, et merites d'un chacun...⁶⁴

(Author's translation : ... as for the one who says that nobles are more genuinely citizens than labourers, we see the contrary in the example of the Swiss Republic, where the nobles don't have any part (in so far as they are nobles) in the offices of the state. Plutarch has well said that the right of the citizenry is to have a part in the laws and privileges of a city, who ought to be heard according to the condition of each, the nobles as nobles, the workers as workers, and the women and children according to age, gender, condition and merits of each... “)

In Bodin's philosophy then, class itself could be set aside within the ideal republic. In this way, his writings echo the political and even religious philosophy of Calvin. Reformed theology largely abolished not only the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the traditional church, but with its emphasis on salvation by grace alone and the utter helplessness of humans, abolished distinctions between individuals within society. The French Crown, at the time Bodin was writing this work (1570s) assumed a very different philosophy of society. Bodin's work appeals not only to divine or traditional precedents for the establishment of the true republic, but he also appeals to reason. Reason goes beyond religious creed and applies to all. This, at least, was the view that Bodin seems to make. He analyzes the existing system within France, but stops short of calling for revolution. In this way, his work is very much in harmony with humanism and writers like de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, and François Rabelais. And while all of these personages found

⁶⁴ Ibid, 57

support and audiences for their works, especially amongst those sympathetic to the humanist cause, an even greater representative of French humanism, the *middle way*, and ultimately of the late-century *politique* party was at work in an obscure tower in the wine country of Gascony.

Michel de Montaigne, inventor of the personal, introspective essay, echoed the substance of the new understanding, the rebirth, and re-emphasis on a more individual identity, while maintaining the outward symbolism of the old order. Even more germane to our topic is the fact that Montaigne took Boetie's advice to withdraw very literally—he would retire from public life and spend several decades writing, thinking, and pondering the world around him from the vantage point of his tower library. This constitutes a literal and figurative withdrawal from both the tyranny of the age, as well as its controversies.

Like Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, and Jean Bodin, Montaigne commented on the abuses he saw in society, Church, and state but throughout maintained a loyalty to 'King and Country.' He called for a rejection of the narrow-minded approaches of the past. This is especially clear in his essay entitled, "*On the Cannibals*." He describes the tribes of First Nation peoples encountered by French explorers like Villegaignon and the reaction of the French people to them. As would be expected, the reaction seems to have been one of revulsion, and the cry that these people were 'barbarians,' and 'cannibals.' Montaigne, on the other hand, writes with the verve of the new understanding:

...I find (from what has been told me) that there is nothing savage or barbarous about those peoples, but that every man calls barbarous anything he is not accustomed to; it is indeed the case that we have no other criterion of truth or right-reason than the example and form of the opinions and customs of our own country. There we always find the perfect religion, the perfect polity, the most developed and perfect way of doing anything! Those 'savages' are only wild in the sense that we call fruits when they are produced by Nature in her ordinary course: whereas it is fruit which we have artificially perverted and misled from the common order which we

ought to call savage...They are still governed by the laws of Nature and are only very slightly bastardized by ours; but their purity is such that I am sometimes seized with irritation at their not having been discovered earlier, in times when there were men who could have appreciated them better than we do.⁶⁵

Montaigne inverts the traditional understanding in this passage. As an individual, Montaigne evaluated the inhabitants of the New World himself, not through the eyes of the Church, or the traditional society of Western Europe, or France, but through his own eyes, drawing his own conclusions. Critical of abuses within the Church and follies within the State, Montaigne clearly remained wedded to the traditional order of Crown and Catholic Church within France. In his essay *'On the Freedom of Conscience,'* he writes that, "It is quite normal to see good intentions, when not carried out with moderation, urging men to actions that are truly vicious. In the present quarrel which is driving France to distraction with its civil wars, the better and more wholesome side is certainly the one upholding the religion and constitution of our country."⁶⁶

Montaigne broke with many of the standard beliefs and practices not only of the Royalist and Catholic forces, but also of the humanists themselves. He was, in this sense, a gentle maverick—a rebel in the mold of Etienne de la Boetie. For example, he did not maintain classical philosophical norms but superseded them. He did not stand aloof from the common person, condemning their ignorance. Instead, he recognized in them a common humanity. Above all, Montaigne does not seem to have believed that humanity was capable of limitless progress and achievement. On the contrary, a human is as he is—neither more nor less. Wisdom, for Montaigne, lies in recognizing that fact.

⁶⁵ Michel de Montaigne, trans. M.A. Screech, *The Complete Essays* (London: Penguin, 2003), 231-232.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 759.

Montaigne certainly possessed a classicizing, literary, Latin strain. His father, Pierre, had made sure that young Michel spoke Latin as his first language. This rather novel approach seems to have been in harmony, however, with the humanist belief that the proper study of language was paramount in the education of the young. It was not just any language, but instead, ‘pure’ or ‘classical’ Latin. Montaigne would go on to say that, “As for myself, I was over six years old before French or Perigordin meant any more to me than Arabic. Without artifice, books, grammar, rules, whipping, or tears, I had by that time learned to speak as pure a Latin as my teacher himself.”⁶⁷ Much like the educational theories of Erasmus, Montaigne’s education was thoroughly humanist in nearly every respect.

Underneath the classical/literary aspects of Montaigne’s work is also a deep sense of Renaissance curiosity. No subject is off limits for him precisely because the world of humankind and the inner world of thought and soul were the two great areas that Montaigne sought to understand. Montaigne’s classicism combined with his curiosity led him into a deep study of the ancient philosophers to whom Montaigne owed much. Frequently, he resorts to the philosophers and philosophical schools of antiquity for support. He notes in “On Sadness” that the, “...stoics forbid this emotion [sadness] to their sages as being base and cowardly.”⁶⁸ He concludes in “Our Emotions Get Carried Away Beyond us,” that, ““Do what thou hast to do, and know thyself”—that great precept...often cited by Plato...embraces our entire duty, generally, and similarly embraces its fellow.”⁶⁹ He often shows great respect for the ancients, precisely like the other great humanist authors, assuming that the ancients were much more profound, wise, and

⁶⁷Michel de Montaigne, *The Autobiography of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Marvin Lowenthal (Jaffrey, New Hampshire: David R. Godine, 1963), 13.

⁶⁸Michel de Montaigne, “On Sadness,” in *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 7.

⁶⁹Ibid, 11.

intellectually curious than the scholars and people of the sixteenth century.⁷⁰ There were times when he undermined them, allowing his own reasoning to lead him in new directions that, arguably the ancients would not have accepted.

An emphasis on classical literature, philosophy, and curiosity met together in Montaigne, enlivened by a wry sense of humor. Montaigne was also not beholden to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.⁷¹ Above all, the teachings of the Church were, for him, subjects of intellectual inquiry. For example, Montaigne notes that there are, essentially, two options for humans, either a total acceptance of the teachings of the Church, or a total rejection. Agnosticism, a kind of halfway house between theism and atheism, seems not to be congenial to his way of thinking. Montaigne describes that he went through a period of time when he abandoned the beliefs and practices of his church but, always curious, continued to discuss them with sages. He writes that, "...after discussing them with learned men, I found they were established on solid grounds, and nothing but ignorance or stupidity would make us respect them any less than the others."⁷² The point to note here is that, for Montaigne, authority alone was not enough to establish the teachings of the Church, but rather objective intellectual inquiry and a

⁷⁰"The liberty of these ancient minds produced various schools, But now men all travel the same road. We receive our sciences by civil authority and decree, so that every school has the same pattern and curriculum. We no longer note what the coin weighs and is really worth...we only ask if it will pass. We take medicine as seriously as geometry. Hocus-pocus, witchcraft, magic, talking with the dead, astrology, fortunetelling—all passes without contradiction" Ibid, 207.

⁷¹ Roger Trinquet argues that Montaigne demonstrated a remarkably equitable approach to religion in his life, not going to extremes. He writes, "Ainsi, grace à une sagesse et à un discernement remarquablement précoces, Montaigne a échappé à la fois à l'irréligion de nature épicurienne que ses excès sensuels auraient pu faire craindre pour lui, et aux séductions multiples que l'hérésie exerçait alors sur les jeunes esprits."

"Thus, thanks to a certain wisdom and to a remarkably precocious discernment, Montaigne escaped, at the same time, the irreligion of an epicurean nature whose sensual excesses could have seduced him (been cause for alarm)... as well as the the multiple seductions... on young minds." (Author's translation). Roger Trinquet, *La Jeunesse de Montaigne* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1972), 576.

⁷²Lowenthal, 220.

reasoned consideration of said teachings. So far, it would seem that Montaigne's humanism was about the same as that of the other great thinkers of his time. However, it is just at this point that the differences become more apparent. One searches in vain for an élite or courtly view of life throughout his writings. Machiavelli sought to ingratiate himself with the rulers of Florence; Marguerite de Navarre was a member of the royal house of France; Copernicus sought the approval of the highest officials in church and state. Montaigne sought none of these. His attitude towards the monarchy was balanced and reasoned, similar to that expressed by Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, and Jean Bodin.⁷³ Towards the common people, he expressed an unusual respect. In fact, a kind of egalitarianism characterizes his writing and philosophy.

As noted above, many humanists believed that humanity was not only the center of creation but was also a being capable of attaining to a near limitless progress. Montaigne seems to have believed, after a long process of intellectual evolution, that humans, animals, and even inanimate creation were all, more or less, equivalents. Going even farther, Montaigne suggests that animals might even, in their own way, stand in judgment of humans—and the verdict is not positive. Montaigne writes,

Why should it be a defect in the beasts, not in us, which stops all communications between us? We can only guess whose fault it is that we cannot understand each other...They may reckon us to be brute beasts for the same reason that we reckon them to be so. It is no great miracle if we cannot understand them: we cannot understand Basques or Troglodytes!⁷⁴

⁷³He wrote that, "I look upon our kings with simply a loyal and respectful affection, neither prompted nor restrained by my own interests; and I like myself for it." Ibid, 80.

⁷⁴Montaigne, *Essays*, 506.

It is possible that Montaigne was hinting at something even greater than the rather common idea that humans are, in fact, below the rest of creation. Montaigne even came to believe in the essential unity of all creation and the multiplicity of life found within it.⁷⁵

The life and work of Michel de Montaigne leads the researcher to several conclusions. First, Montaigne, together with Etienne de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, and Jean Bodin, occupied an intermediary stance throughout the years of the Wars of Religion. He maintained outward conformity to all of the traditional structures of French society: his role as a country squire, adherence to the Catholic Church and loyalty to the Crown, and a kind of erudite Catholic Humanism that was very much in the line of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. Contrarily, however, he showed much restraint when discussing the Huguenots, deplored the violence of the wars, and was very free in criticizing traditional French society, structures, and attitudes—even turning them occasionally on their heads.

Much of what Montaigne wrote about in his *Essais* translated itself into real life, finding alternate expression in his travel journal. Written between 1581 and 1582, Montaigne's journal consists of some portions that were dictated by Montaigne to a secretary whose identity remains, to us, unknown and other portions that were clearly written by Montaigne himself. Unlike the more famous *Essays*, the *Journal* passed out of history for centuries, its existence forgotten by almost everyone. The prose is not altogether memorable. The observations are interesting, certainly, but not out of the ordinary. The essays reflect a younger man's experience; Montaigne was in his mid-30s when he began writing the *Essays*. It was the more mature Michel de Montaigne who recorded his journey in 1581. Nevertheless, the same Montaigne who appears in

⁷⁵ Michael Baraz, *L'Être et la Connaissance selon Montaigne* (Toulouse : Librairie José Corti, 1968), 12.

the *Journal* is the one the reader encounters in the *Essais*. Several examples from the *Essais* will ably establish this point. In “That Difficulty Increases Desire,” Montaigne states that, “We see also that by nature there is nothing so contrary to our taste than that satiety which comes from ease of access; and nothing which sharpens them more than rareness and difficulty: “*Omnium rerum voluptas ipso quo debet fugare periculo crescit.*’ [Translation: In all things pleasure is increased by the very danger which ought to make us flee from them.]”⁷⁶

In “On Books,” Montaigne declares that, “If one book wearies me I take up another, applying myself to it only during those hours when I begin to be gripped by boredom at doing nothing.”⁷⁷ There is a quality of restlessness to Montaigne’s mind. He is not content to meditate very long on most subjects, but allows his mind to wander. He follows his train of thought wherever it might take him. This is characteristic also of the *Journal*. Immediately after commenting on the deficiencies of the Florentine courtesans, Montaigne turns his attention to mechanics demonstrating a humanist fascination with machinery. Nonetheless, his peripatetic mind soon turns away from machines towards his own bodily functions. With no breaks between thoughts, we read that, “I saw the shops of the silk spinners; they have certain machines, by turning which one single woman can twist and turn five hundred spindles at once. Tuesday morning I ejected a little red stone.”⁷⁸ On the one hand machinery and a growing mechanization of life; on the other hand, a kidney stone: Montaigne was not able to remain long on either subject. For as soon as he tells us about the machines and the kidney stone, he turns toward another subject. He writes, in quick succession, “Wednesday I saw the grand duke’s casino. What seemed most important to me was a rocky structure in the form of a pyramid, composed

⁷⁶ Montaigne, *Essays*, 695.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁷⁸ Michel de Montaigne, *Journal de Voyages*, ed. Donald Frame (San Francisco: North Point, 1983), 143.

and fabricated of all kinds of natural minerals, one piece of each, joined together. This structure later spouted water, by which many objects inside it were seen to be set in motion...”⁷⁹ Clearly, since all of these observations occur within ten printed lines of continuous text, the eclectic nature of Montaigne’s thinking becomes quite clear.

Montaigne commented on his life in later years by saying, “I have aged since I began this book, and it has not been without some acquisition. The years have been so generous as to familiarize me with the stone in the bladder...I wish they had chosen something more welcome. For there is no disease which, all my life, I have held in greater horror.”⁸⁰ In Montaigne’s 16th century, there were no analgesics; surgery was without anesthetic, without sterile conditions, and highly dangerous. Kidney stones, like so many other diseases, had to be endured. Montaigne sought ease from his physical pain by seeking out the reputed healing powers of various natural springs and baths that dotted not only the French, but also the Swiss, German, and Italian landscape. These sources became a primary feature of Montaigne’s *Journal*. It is not surprising that Montaigne would rather go on a long journey in search of healing than stay at home and seek medical attention from the physicians of his day. One also searches in vain for a reference to miraculous cures in Montaigne’s *Journal*. It simply is not there. With each stop along his journey, Montaigne sought out spas and local treatments in hopes of achieving relief.

A historian might object that the above discussion relates only tangentially to the broader discussion of the French Civil Wars and the ‘Third Way’. While understandable, that evaluation is wrong. One of the central points in this essay has been to argue that the Humanists believed that the importance of the individual was more important than that of the group. *If* that were the

⁷⁹ Ibid, 143.

⁸⁰ Lowenthal, 227.

case, then it would follow that, in the minds of the humanists, neither ideological side, Catholic or Huguenot, was ultimately as important as the people of France who were suffering deprivations, death, famine and disease because of the wars. This understanding undergirded the Third Way throughout its existence and this is precisely what we find in the writings of Montaigne. It also, at least in part, undergirds the *Édit de Nantes*, a document that guaranteed a degree of tolerance to both of the fighting sides in the *guerres*, based heavily on humanist principles and upon the exigencies of practicality.

Michel de Montaigne was, clearly, more concerned with humans than he was with theories used to explain humanity itself or human behavior in particular. Compassion for ‘the other’ always seems to win over theology, sect, or philosophical school. Montaigne, living at a time of discovery, exploration, and the beginnings of settlement in the New World, was not, for all the headiness of the time, swept up in that great endeavor. His humanity, and concomitant regard for his fellow humans, characterizes his essays and his *Travel Journal*. Montaigne’s journal bears certain similarities to other famous memoirists of the sixteenth century like the Belgian *Chronicles and Memoirs of Pasquier de la Barre of Tournai, 1559-1567*, and the French *Memoires of Pierre de l’Étoile*. Compared with both of these, Montaigne’s *Travel Journal*, however, shows a rather surprising set of differences as well as similarities. All three show a certain dispassionate respect for Christianity, although none of them seem to give whole-hearted support to the ‘new teaching’ of the Calvinists.⁸¹ Secondly, they all represent a respect for the Classical Latin authors of antiquity. Thirdly, there is a tacit acknowledgement of the Roman Catholic Church and the established ‘powers that be.’ Above all, there is a certain coldness.

⁸¹ Pasquier de la Barre, *The Time of Troubles in the Low Countries: The Chronicles and Memoirs of Pasquier de la Barre of Tournai, 1559-1567*, trans. Charlie R. Steen (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 99.

In Montaigne, however, there is a different tone. The attitude towards the supernatural or religious found in Montaigne's *Journal* is, if not skeptical, then at the very least neutral concerning both churches. Rather than reacting with awe to displays of papal power and pageantry when in Rome, Montaigne describes Easter Sunday services where the pope himself officiated and distributed the elements to the powerful cardinals of the Curia. He notes, tartly, that, "There is a certain instrument for drinking from the chalice, in order to provide safety from poison. It seemed novel to him [Montaigne], both at this Mass and others, that the Pope and cardinals and other prelates are seated, and, almost all through the mass, covered, chatting and talking together. These ceremonies seem to be more magnificent than devout."⁸² It should be remembered that Montaigne was raised a Catholic, in a Catholic country. He did not have qualms about dismissing the highest echelons of Roman Catholic power with a word.

Montaigne's travel journal also exhibits some classicizing tendencies, in line with the great authors of the Renaissance. Montaigne was curious about the rest of the world, and sought a cure for his ailment; on the other hand, Montaigne wished to see Rome, seat of those classical authors he so deeply admired. But just as in the case of religion, Montaigne maintained a much more independent attitude towards the classical authors than many of his humanist contemporaries. His writing is replete with references to the classics, and he even more frequently uses figures from antiquity either as models to follow or, conversely, to avoid.

Above all, as has been noted, Montaigne's writing was characterized by his compassion for others. This should not be taken to mean that Montaigne was merely sentimental or emotional. Instead, Montaigne represents a realistic, rational understanding that humanity

⁸² Montaigne, *Journal*, 74.

deserves a certain kind of respect within the larger structure of the whole of creation. Montaigne notes with approbation that at Mirecourt there was an institution for the sensible training and education of young girls.⁸³ At Plombières, he notes that the people there were, "...a good people, free, sensible, considerate. All the laws of the country are religiously observed."⁸⁴ In Mulhouse, an Alsatian town then under Swiss rule, Montaigne notes cheerfully that the town was Protestant but, nonetheless, all of the churches were well kept and Protestants and Catholics intermarry, "...indiscriminately...before the priest, and do not force them to change."⁸⁵

These examples demonstrate a down-to-earth quality that Montaigne possessed that is not found in many writings of the time. What we see of the author then is clear: Montaigne was consistent in his approach to life as set forth in the *Essais* as well as in the *Journal*. His journey represented a medical trip in that he sought ease from his kidney stones. Montaigne's journal rests upon the Renaissance understanding that man, not God, is the appropriate study and measure of man. Montaigne, like the others discussed above, was at the center-point of a web of connectivity that linked both sides of the period of the *guerres*. He remained a Catholic throughout his life, and was outwardly loyal to the Crown. He maintained warm friendships with Catholics and was able to avoid the destruction of his estates by bands of royalist soldiers. And yet, he intermingled freely with Protestant Swiss, made positive observations about their ways, and could appreciate the theological implications called for by the Calvinists. He never called for radical revolt or the restructuring of French society. His magnum opus, the *Essais*, was the product of withdrawal from the conflict of his day into a personal world of thought, reflection, and communion with the great writers especially of classical antiquity. His revolt was both humanist

⁸³ Montaigne, *Journal*, 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 9-10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

and internal. It was, literally, in his withdrawal into the tower of his chateau, and figuratively, a rebellion by means of withdrawing support from the structures, powers, and society of his day, all the while awaiting a better day in the future. This echoes the writings and philosophy of his younger friend Boetie.

Etienne de la Boetie never attempted to overthrow the French government. He withdrew his support of its reactionary policies and retreated into a humanist world of thought and of the mind. Likewise, Pierre de l'Étoile (1546-1611) represents, socially, a midway point between the peasantry and the nobility. He was able to work for the royal government while maintaining his intellectual freedom and withdrawing support from the government's more reactionary policies, a strategy employed by Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, Jean Bodin, and Michel de Montaigne. His family was what might be termed middle class—according to the standards of the time—but with ties to exalted circles of scholars and parlementaires.⁸⁶ Son of Louis de l'Estoile and Marguerite de Montholon, Pierre de l'Estoile was born in 1546 in the royal capital city, Paris during the last year of the reign of François I. He received a humanist education and an upbringing within the Catholic faith. In 1565, he began his studies at the university at Bourges where he read law.⁸⁷ Before the end of 1566, de l'Estoile left his legal studies at Bourges and his famous humanist tutor Alexander Arbuthnot.⁸⁸ His first wife, whom he married in 1569, was named Anne de Baillon.⁸⁹ Anne died in 1580. Two years later, l'Estoile married again, this time with Colombe Marteau.⁹⁰ While his first marriage had produced seven children, his second

⁸⁶ Pierre de l'Estoile, *Registre Journal du Regne de Henri III*, eds. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenk (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 7-8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

would produce ten.⁹¹ Entwined with both primary parties of the age of the Civil Wars, l'Estoile walked a middle path that fits in well with the attitudes, beliefs and practices of Marguerite de Navarre and François Rabelais.

The War of the Three Henries, so named because Henri III, King of France, Henri de Navarre, who would become Henri IV, and Henri duc de Guise fought for control of France and the Crown, provided a series of blows for de l'Estoile that would continue throughout what might be termed de l'Estoile's *annus horribilis* in 1590. In October of 1590, having fled Paris with his pregnant wife, he encountered a group of Spanish soldiers of Philip II who seized his wife as a hostage. The captors reduced the ransom money, originally set at 500 écus, to 175 écus, paid by one Mademoiselle Miron. Colombe was able to return to Paris, as is recorded in the journal "...sous la conduit de Dieu, qui l'a preserve d'aussi grands hazards que femme ait courus il y a long-temps."⁹² (Translation: "...under the protection of God, which preserved her from the great hazards the women have endured for a very long time.") This terrifying time was followed, throughout the remainder of 1590 with the deaths of several of his associates and friends including the royal surgeon Ambroise Paré, a royalist and Catholic, and Bernard Palissi, a noted Huguenot.⁹³

This fact, that l'Estoile was a man of the middle and stood at the center of a network of people spanning the ideology spectrum of sixteenth century France, is demonstrated in several ways. Historically, in terms of the actions he took it is clear: he maintained his friendship with Béroalde, humanist and Huguenot, even despite the fact that he fled Paris as the troubles of the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² As quoted by Lazard and Schrenk in L'Estoile, 14.

⁹³ Ibid, 15.

Civil Wars began to spread in 1562.⁹⁴ The deaths of both royalist Ambroise Paré and Huguenot Bernard Palissi deeply grieved him. He attempted to aid Huguenots as well as attending processions and rallies held by the Parisian Catholic League.⁹⁵

On the other end of the politico-religious spectrum, L'Estoile counted amongst his friends the Huguenot firebrand, François Hotman. L'Estoile occupied a similar kind of position as that of Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, and even Michel de Montaigne: individuals that attempted, throughout the second half of the 16th century to work, perhaps subversively, for a middle ground. That, in essence is the fundamental argument of this essay. He guarded a certain independence from both of the two major ideological parties of his day.

Outside of prominent Huguenots and Catholics, L'Estoile also continued to pursue humanist studies well into his old age. His interest went beyond the parochial concerns that were tearing France apart and focused on the international stage in a way that is strikingly modern. His writings and actions demonstrate a kind of subversiveness that also characterized Montaigne, Navarre, Bodin, and Rabelais. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this work, Rabelais' Chronicles are full of revolutionary substance. But he did this under the cover of a disguise. Everything, he insists, is similar to traditional, grotesque medicine boxes that are ugly on the outside—even outlandish—but hold lifesaving medicine. This phrase possesses an inherent ambiguity. However, one can interpret it as meaning that Rabelais was working for reform under the cover of absurd stories, of farce, and the world turned upside down. L'Estoile would also adopt something of this ironic, satiric tone in his own writings. Thus, similar to Rabelais, L'Estoile seems to obscure more controversial opinions and observations beneath a veneer of

⁹⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 15.

outward loyalty towards and conformity with the tradition structures and orders of French society. This bears a marked similarity to the works and actions of Montaigne, with whom L'Estoile maintained an acquaintanceship.⁹⁶ A network begins to emerge when one looks at the historical landscape of sixteenth century France that is obscured when the historian follows the bi-polarity of the traditional historiography, the Protestant versus Catholic dichotomy. Seen from a different point of view, Montaigne and L'Estoile, Rabelais and Navarre, to name but a few were at the heart of a network that linked the Royal Family on the one hand with Calvin and Hotman on the other. The two extremes—Royalist and Huguenot—were balanced in the center by the *humanist* side that sought a more moderate reform, politically, socially, and religiously, while maintaining the traditional order of society as well as its symbols.

A closer examination of the writings of L'Estoile will help to demonstrate this fact. Firstly, in terms of approach, the journals of L'Estoile strikingly echo the tone of Guillaume and Michel Le Riche—both were religiously Catholic and outwardly served the Crown. In private life, however they maintained close friendships within a network that included Huguenots, Catholics, and *politiques*. Their journals, too, do demonstrate their adherence to Catholicism but a relative non-judgmental stance regarding the Huguenots. Over time, the writings of Michel Le Riche would increasingly turn against the Huguenots and towards a more reactionary stance—a factor that tends to separate him from the direction taken by de l'Estoile. The clearly expressed animosity towards the religious minority found in the writings of Claude Haton and Blaise de Monluc are missing in these three expressions of 16th century moderate thought.

L'Estoile begins the journal in humanist fashion, comparing his work to a cabinet of curiosities. He commences by saying “*Registre journal d'un curieux de plusieurs choses*

⁹⁶ Ibid, 23-24.

memorable advenues et publiées librement à la françoise pendant et Durant le regne de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, lequel commença le dimanche XXX may, jour de Pentecoste, 1574, sur les trois heures après minuict”⁹⁷ (Translation: Register-journal of a curious man of many memorable things that have happened and published freely in French during the reign of Henri III, king of France and of Poland, which began Saturday 30 May, the day of Pentecost, 1574, at three o’clock after midnight.) He defines himself as one who is curious, determined to record frankly what happened during the reign of Henri III. Interestingly enough, even in these first few lines of the work, l’Estoile affirms a central tenet of this work by insisting that François I “...restablist les Estudes.”⁹⁸ Clearly, L’Estoile read the public image portrayed by François I as being the *restaurateur des arts et des lettres*. He contrasts the ‘enlightened’ reign of the former with the lack of enlightenment in his successor: “Le Roi Henri III aime les desbauches et le luxe. Toute la cour fond en delices et en dissolutions.”⁹⁹ (King Henri III loves debaucheries and luxury. The entire court is melting in delights and dissolutions). He adds a note to this introduction suggesting that Henri III was not reigning according to the traditions of his ancestors : “Il [Henri III] est aussi peu en la puissance de toute la faculté terrienne d’engarder la liberté françoise de parler, comme d’enfouir le soleil en terre, ou l’enfermer dedans un trou. »¹⁰⁰ (He [Henri III] has as much power of all earthly faculties to guard French freedom of speech, as the earth has the power to bury the sun or to enclose it in a hole.)

L’Estoile took his journals from the opening of Henri III’s reign on the 30th May, 1574 until its close on Wednesday, 2nd August, 1589 “...a deux heures après minuict.”¹⁰¹ (two hours after midnight). This gives us a very precise delineation of the time-frame covered by the work.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 53.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

His journal comes after the great watershed of the Saint-Barthélemy—thus in the time of the decline of Protestant fortunes in France. This was a time of great confusion during which the Catholic king of France attempted to balance the religious divide in his country and, thereby, earn the ire of the ultra-catholic conservatives and the *Catholic League*—a fact reflected by the pamphlets published by or for the League itself. Indeed a member of the league would eventually assassinate Henri III. It was also during the time of L’Estoile’s journal writing that Jean Bodin would publish his *Six Books of the Republic* and the *politique* movement would gain greater strength within France. Indeed the accession to the throne of Henri IV and the subsequent promulgation of the *Edit de Nantes* can be seen as the ultimate victory of the ‘middle way’ in France.

The classic humanist themes are present in L’Estoile’s writing, renaissance curiosity, placing a certain kind of value on the individual, a deep reverence for the past of classical (and Christian) antiquity, and a Latinizing tendency coupled with an acceptance of the vernacular tongue. The primacy and purity of the classical age can be seen early on in the work—at least as L’Estoile edited it later in life. He wrote “*Les anciens historiens aussi vides de flatterie et d’affeterie comme nous en sommes plains, n’ont point celé les vices des Princes dont ils ont escrit les vertues...’Opus aggredior (dit Tacite au commencement de son Histoire, Livre 1^{er}) plenum variis casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevum.’ C’est le regne de Henri III.*”¹⁰² (Translation: The ancient historians also, as empty of flattery and affectedness as we are full, have not at all approved the vices of the Princes about which they wrote the virtues...’I begin the work [says Tacitus at the beginning of his History, book 1) which is full of various disasters, atrocious battles, civil struggles, and as for the peace, there was

¹⁰² Ibid, 54.

violence.’ *That* is the reign of Henri III.) L’Estoile seems to use this brief quotation to sum up his view of the entire reign of Henri III—a time that was, above all, savage. Indeed his disillusion with the age was summed up in a small poem that L’Estoile wrote in 1580 as the commencement, or even gateway, to the entire work:

Le Coeur est une forge où forgent à deux mains Sathan, la Chair, le Monde, un monde d’entreprises; L’enclume et les marteaux sont les moiens humains, les charbons alums nos foles convoitises. La matière est un RIEN qui reçoit toutes guises, richesse, honneur, estats, souls la trempe du bien. Mais la MORT, par derrière, usant de ses surprises, vient crever le soufflet, et ne s’achève RIEN.¹⁰³

(The heart is a forge wherein Satan, the flesh, and the world craft a world of undertakings; the anvil and hammers are human means, the charcoal enflames our foolish/crazy greediness. The material is a nothing, which takes on every mask, richness, honor, estate, under the appearance of good. But death, behind it, using its surprises, comes to steal the breath and nothing has been attained. Author’s Translation).

The work is reminiscent of the journals of the Le Riche family; it also resembles the journal of Pasquier de le Barre who kept his journal during the years of trouble in the southern Netherlands. The tone of all three is more or less cool, calm, and journalistic—it is lacking the fire and warlike condemnations that fill the pages of the journals of Haton, Monluc, and Guise. Fascinatingly, L’Estoile blames the Civil Wars on a general hypocrisy on all sides. Speaking about the death of Charles IX, 30 May, 1574, L’Estoile notes that “...et le Roiaume de France [est] troublé de guerres civiles, **soubs les pretextes de religion et bien public**, quasi par toutes les provinces d’icelui...où les Huguenots et leurs Catholiques associés mal contents, avoient

¹⁰³ Ibid, 55.

occupé plusieurs villes...et tenoient les champs en grandes troupes. “¹⁰⁴ (Translation :...and the kingdom of France is troubled with civil wars, under the pretext of religion and the public good, in almost all the provinces...where the Huguenots and their unhappy Catholic associates had occupied many towns...and were holding the fields with great troops of soldiers.) This statement is telling in that L’Estoile identifies with neither group—both appear to be outside of his own personal realm, as reflected by the journal.

Like the early memoirs of Guillaume Le Riche, Pierre de l’Estoile reports the happenings of the Religious war with a surprising degree of equanimity. It is clear that he remains a Catholic, but nowhere engages in invective—personal or otherwise—against the Protestants of France. In addition, while he nowhere calls for revolution himself, his quiet condemnation of the Crown is striking. He includes a small poem in memory of the death of Charles IX (*Tumbeau de Charles IX Roy de France, 1574*). The poem spares nothing, stating that Charles IX was “*Plus cruel que Neron...*” and “*...hay de ses subjects...*” (“More cruel than Nero “...and “...hated by his subjects.) Most damning, however, are what comes later in the poem “*...Execrable jureur, et publiq adultère, des eglises premier le domaine il vendist, et son bien et l’autrui follement despendist, de vilains il peupla l’ordre des Chevaliers, La France d’ignorants Prelats et Conseillers, tout son regne ne fut qu’un horrible carnage, et mourut enfermé comme un chien qui enrage.*”¹⁰⁵ (Translation : “...execrable juror, and public adulterer, he sold first the church’s land, his goods and those of others were foolishly squandered, he populated the order of knights with villains, France with ignorant prelates and counselors, all his reign is nothing but a terrible carnage, and died caged like an enraged dog“). The opening poem condemned fully the reign of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 60.

Henri III; this poem, at the death of Charles IX, condemns Henri III's predecessor's reign. The fact that L'Estoile included this poem is telling: he did not approve of the way in which the two surviving sons of Henri II and Catherine de Medici were running the country. L'Estoile also spares no affection for the queen mother. He appears to delight in recording a verse that mocks Catherine and the "...italiens jouissans par son moien des premiers estats et charges du Roiaume..."¹⁰⁶ (Author's translation: "...Italians enjoying by means of the queen mother the first estate and offices of the Kingdom"). This betrays something of a dislike for the rise of Catherine's Italian protégés and her own foreign Italian roots.

Like the majority of people in his age, Pierre de L'Estoile was a convinced theist—even if his precise religious views were somewhat vague, a trait he shared with other humanists including Pasquier de le Barre of Tournai. He notes on 28 July 1574 that "*En ce mois de juillet, un miserable atheiste et fol (comme l'un n'est jamais sans l'autre), nommé Geoffroi Vallée, fust pendu et estranglé à Paris et son corps mis en cendres...*"¹⁰⁷ (Translation: "In this month of July, a miserable and crazy/foolish atheist [because one is never without the other], named Geoffroi Vallée, was hanged and strangled at Paris, his body burned to cinders...") Clearly, atheism did not receive approval from L'Estoile, a trait he shared not only with the Catholics of his day, but also with the Calvinists, a reference to the burning of Servetus in Geneva. When he deals with the subject of the Protestants, L'Estoile maintains a tantalizing vague approval without ever coming close enough to outright agreement to avoid any accusation of having joined their side. He notes for August 1574 that a poem was promulgated that was "...tres scandaleux et satyrique contre la memoire et honneur du feu roy."¹⁰⁸ (Translation: "...very

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 73.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 76.

scandalous and satiric against the memory and honour of the late king”). This poem was “...*sous le nom des Huguenots...*” (Translation: “...under the name of the Huguenots”) but whose author appears to have an *avocat du Parlement* “...*tres catholique...*”¹⁰⁹ As with other examples, L’Estoile appears to take delight in ridiculing the Crown and the ‘tres catholiques’ amongst them. He also takes pains to note that on Friday 10 September 1574 that representatives of the German and French Protestants, including the Prince de Condé, approached the king (Henri III) and asked for greater religious toleration in the kingdom. The king’s response was typical for the Valois monarchs—a pattern extending back to the reign of François I. He seems to have wanted to demonstrate a certain amount of benevolence and tolerance towards the Huguenots (on condition, of course, that they lay down their weapons) but insisted that all of this was much to the contrary of “...*les loix anciennes du Roiaume.*”¹¹⁰ (Translation: “...ancient laws of the Kingdom”). The attempt to demonstrate tolerant Renaissance humanist royal power again collapses by the insistence upon maintaining the ‘*ancient laws*’ of the kingdom. Old and new are thus pitted against one another in practice, while in theory, the Valois still wanted to project an image consistent with the new learning of the Renaissance.

In harmony with the other authors and thinkers of the “Middle Way” Pierre de l’Estoile does not engage in polemic against the Huguenot side. His education and network of acquaintances that spanned the entire ideological spectrum of the Wars of Religion demonstrate a man who was able to balance both without becoming enmeshed in either. Events surrounding the Reformation and religious violence in Paris (and in the broader national context) tend to be reported with a high degree of dispassion. He reserved his ire for the Crown and, later, the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 76.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 77.

Catholic League. Unlike Haton, for example, l'Estoile refers negatively to the '*tueurs*' (translation: *killers*) who carried out the massacres on Saint Bartholomew's Day.¹¹¹ He also notes, for April of 1576, that the Huguenots besieged the city of Nevers. What draws his attention, however, is not the warlike actions of the Protestants but, on the contrary, the actions of the Royalist forces. He writes:

...les gens de pied et de cheval, partizans du Roy, esendus par tous les endroits du Roiaume, vivans, sans conduite ou discipline militaire, à discrétion, sous ombre qu'ils n'estoient pas paiés, pillotent, brigandoient, ravageoient, saccageoient, tuoient, brusloient, violoient et rançonnoient villages et leurs villageois, bourgs et bourgeois. Par ainsi, le pauvre estoit pillé et ruiné et le peuple mangé de tous les deux partis ; car, si en l'ung il y avoit bien des larrons, il n'y en avoit pas faute de brigands en l'autre.¹¹²

(Translation : “ ...the foot soldiers and knights, partisans of the king, spread out through all the places of the Kingdom, living without [proper] conduct or military discipline, at their will, under the shadow of not being paid, pillaged, acted as brigands, ravaged, sacked, killed, burned, violated, and ransomed villages and their inhabitants, towns and their citizens. In this way, the poor were pillaged and ruined and the people devoured by both parties; because, if there were a good many criminals on one side, there was not a shortage of brigands in the other.“)

This statement appears to sum up both the 'Middle Way' and the humanist way of dealing with the Civil Wars. L'Estoile rejected both parties and was able to be critical of the actions both of Crown and of Huguenots. Notable is his sense of compassion for the Huguenots that appears in several places throughout the journal. L'Estoile takes pains to include Huguenot propaganda against the Crown/Catholic forces. Included is a poem published by the Huguenots in connection to the royalist siege of La Charité in 1577. Key to the poem, and included by

¹¹¹ L'Estoile, vol.2, 14.

¹¹² Ibid, 24-25.

l'Estoile, is the line in which the author accuses Crown/Catholic forces of wanting nothing but the ruin of the kingdom "...soubz ombre de Foy..."¹¹³(...under the shadow of faith). L'Estoile does not add any commentary that would suggest that he fundamentally disagreed with this statement. Only a few paragraphs later, l'Estoile includes another poem that was "...semés à Blois, assez grossiers, mais veritable..."¹¹⁴ (Translation: "...distributed at Blois, rather grotesque, but true..."). The anonymous author stresses the fact that he does not want to be a Huguenot and, in general, opposes sectarianism. More important than both is unity because "...la division engendre le Discord..."¹¹⁵ (Translation: "...division engenders discord.") Above all of these, he deplores the loss of reason and the rise of destructive passions. The author bemoans that "*Passion malheureuse, et qui nous ronge et mine, qui procure nos maux, nostre perte et ruine, qui fait de tous nos biens enrichir l'estranger, qui nous pousse au hazard, au péril, au danger...qui nous corne la Guerre.*"¹¹⁶ (Translation : "Unhappy passion, that gnaws and saps us, that procures our woes, our loss, and our ruin, which makes the stranger/foreigner rich with our goods, which pushes us to hazards, peril, and danger...that calls us to war). Here again, the humanist philosophy emerges both within the poem and from the mind of l'Estoile who included the poem without objection. Reason and unity, held together in harmony, lead to peace. Passion and the dominance of emotion lead to violence, war, and destruction.

The Middle Way appears here in the humanist aversion to war. The humanists were linked together by a thoroughly humanist education; a tendency to see, as Bard Thompsen suggests, the immediate past as less important than the history of classical Antiquity; a certain kind of skepticism; and lastly, a tendency to be drawn from the educated, higher, echelons of

¹¹³ Ibid, 104.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 105.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 105-106.

French society. Neither L'Estoile nor the other individuals who made up the middle way called for the formation of an organized side with signed pledges, songs, banners, and marches; neither is there the call to overthrow kings and empires through warfare. Boetie, Montaigne, Bodin, L'Estoile *amongst others* argued instead for a reasoned, rational, and above all, calm withdrawal of support from a tyrannical regime—a retreat inwards towards self-reflection and intellectual communion with the great authors of pagan and Christian antiquity.

By examining the lives, journals, and works of Etienne de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, François Rabelais, Jean Bodin, Michel de Montaigne, and Pierre de L'Estoile, we can begin to gauge more accurately the historical condition of France during the sixteenth century and move towards an answer to the questions posed above. In terms of historical condition, France was fundamentally divided along at least three ideological lines, Royalist Catholic, the Humanist middle, and the Huguenot. These were not, however, isolated, sharply defined parties but rather existed within a spectrum, or web, of connectivity. We can also see how the middle way represented their ideologies in the work during the era of the Civil Wars. The Humanists, diverse as they were, tended to stand roughly in the center of the spectrum, linking the Royalists on the one hand with the Huguenots on the other. The violence of the century also seems to have caused the Humanists to adopt a muted, or cloaked, approach to their beliefs and activities, often concealing their opinions in private journals or, as an example, by placing them within the mouths of literary characters. Much of this was necessitated by the fact that religion and politics in France during the sixteenth century were essentially interchangeable terms. To speak openly against either was to court retribution. It would be the humanists who, as discussed above, eventually came in to their own as the century ended and whose philosophy placed its stamp on the text of the *Édit de Nantes*.

III. Reaction and Radicalism: François Duc de Guise, Claude Haton, Blaise de Monluc.

The examination of the lives and works of a selection of the humanists in France during the sixteenth century, those whom this essay identifies as being of the *middle way*, helped us to move toward answers to the questions that are central to this essay. These questions include an evaluation of the historical condition of France during the sixteenth century; a determination as to how deeply religion and politics were united in France; and lastly, how the actors in this vast drama represented their ideologies in journals, personal writings, and also in the actions that they chose to take. These questions serve as support for the larger issue, which is to demonstrate that the *middle way*, made up largely of the educated humanists of France, had characteristics that made them a coherent group, as opposed to merely a collection of unique individuals. This middle way, typified so eloquently by writers like de la Boetie and Michel de Montaigne, Marguerite de Navarre and François Rabelais, also came to characterize the law that ended the wars permanently and gave both of the opposing sides a measure of tolerance and dignity, the 1598 *Édit de Nantes*. The philosophical underpinnings of this document represent a world view that, in time, transformed Europe.

The Royalist/Catholic group also had a particular world view and set of agendas, just as did the members of the middle way. This group, including the Crown itself, viewed the Civil Wars in a different way from the humanists. While the humanists and the Catholic Royalists may have both bemoaned the devastation to the country, the two parties differed as to the desired outcome, or goal, of a France *after* the conflict. While the humanists were more willing to consider a certain kind of tolerance, a certain level of what might be termed secularism, the Royalist/Catholic party was far less willing to. And while the humanists deplored the violence,

the Crown especially, but also the Church, were willing to use any means necessary to restore the *status quo ante* of France before the onset of the Reformation and/or the humanist movement.

Review what Etienne de la Boetie had written in his *Essay on Voluntary Servitude*:

Mais, ô Grand Dieu, qu'est donc cela? Comment appellerons-nous ce malheur ? Quel est ce vice, ce vice horrible, de voir un nombre infini d'hommes, non seulement obéir, mais servir, non pas être gouvernés, mais être tyrannisés, d'ayant ni biens, ni parents, ni enfants, ni leur vie même qui soient à eux ? De les voir souffrir les rabines, les paillardises, les cruautés, non d'une armée...mais d'un seul!¹¹⁷

(Translation: “What, O Great God, is this? What can we call this unhappiness? What is this vice, this horrible vice, to see an infinite number of men, not only obey but service, not just be governed but to be tyrannized, having neither goods nor family nor children nor their own lives that are really theirs? To see them suffer... the degeneracy, the cruelties, not of an army...but of only one!” Author’s translation.)

He was mourning the human tendency to accept and, worse, cooperate with a tyranny that devours those who support it. It also speaks to the human willingness to harm others to varying degrees in the name of ideology and/or self-aggrandizement. The forces of the Crown utilized anyone they could, employing them in acts of violence and cruelty, to maintain their power base and the structures upon which that power rested. The Genevan Reformed within France committed, for their part, acts of violence and desecration that hurt others and violated societal sensibilities—in the name of remaking France according to their religious agenda. Both of these parties rejected the essence of what Boetie was calling for—moderation, tolerance, and a rational approach to life. Both of these parties had mutually exclusive absolutist models that they sought to impose on the rest of society by force, denying to all others an essential freedom of

¹¹⁷ Boetie, *Servitude*, 3

conscience. In this respect, they share a somewhat reactionary, tyrannical element. The difference lies in the fact that the Crown was still pursuing a public image of enlightened Renaissance monarchy while prosecuting a reactionary, anti-Renaissance agenda. The Protestants had united the symbolism and the substance of the new learning, pushed it to its radical extremes, and launched a campaign to restructure church, state, and society. Given the fact that the dialogue failed, only violence remained as an option for the Crown to pursue.

The policy inaugurated by François I continued through the reigns of his successors, and the queen mother, Catherine de Medici. This period stretched from 1515, when François I became King, until 1589 and the deaths of the last of the Valois, Henri III, as well as Catherine herself. Their dynastic demise opened the way for the Bourbons to assume power in the guise of Henri IV (reigned 1589-1610). Upon the death of François I in 1547, Henri II assumed the throne of France, with his queen consort, Catherine de Medici at his side. He also took upon himself the burden of the growing disagreement between the Royalist/Catholic Forces on the one hand and the Protestant/Huguenot movement—now with much more firm leadership in the form of John Calvin, safely in exile in Geneva. Henri II proved to be an able ruler who was, like his father, caught between the twin bipolarities of the continued conflict with the Habsburgs on the one hand, and the growing strength of the Reformation in France, now given firmer leadership in the person of John Calvin. Henri II's character was different from that of his father in several ways—as a child, especially after having spent several years as a hostage of Charles V in Spain in exchange for his father's freedom, Henri was less quick, subtle, or capricious than his predecessor. More bent towards introspection, a heavy piety, and brooding, Henri proved to be a serious man, much more devoted to his mistress, Diane de Poitiers, than to his wife or, arguably, to matters of state. The ten years of Catherine de Medici's inability to produce a son and heir

exacerbated this problem. Henry appears to have been less interested in projecting the image of Renaissance prince than was François I. More forthright, the years of Henri's reign were pre-occupied with a much more overt attempt to reduce the impact of the Reformation and to break the Habsburg encirclement of France.

For the purposes of this discussion, his domestic policies are of primary interest. The dispute between the Royalist and Huguenot forces intensified throughout Henri II's reign to the point that by his sudden death in 1559 (from a jousting accident), France was on the brink of open hostility. Long before this, however, Henri II had continued the policies of his father and predecessor, François I. The Edict of Chateaubriant (1551) had continued the persecution of Protestants and other 'heretics' throughout the kingdom. The rest of his reign, however, from 1551 until the signing of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 was taken up by wars on the Italian peninsula. These wars, known also as the Habsburg-Valois Wars, lasted for most of the years of the 1550s and involved, first, Charles V and later, once he abdicated in 1556, to his heir, Phillip II—all three committed deeply to Catholicism and the eradication of the Protestant heresy. Henri II was well aware that Protestantism was not just a theological reform movement but had deep sociological overtones that posed a danger to the established order. Throughout his reign, Henri II had maintained much of the posture of a Renaissance prince although somewhat less so than François I. His opposition to the Protestants was more overt and many of the actions he took dropped the pretense of enlightened Renaissance monarch—although some of that was still present. Catherine who, as inheritor of much of the royal authority after Henri II's death maintained much more of the Florentine/Italian humanist posture of learning and humane letters, devotion to the arts and scholarship. Her role is more important than Henri II's because her power and control over the throne lasted from the latter's death in 1559 until her own death in

1589—presiding over three kings, her sons until the dissolution of the House of Valois. Her importance can hardly be over-estimated.

The forces of the Crown tended to be unified by several elements. They may have been educated well, as is the case of François Duc de Guise and even the kings François I and Henri II, but they did not appear to have adopted humanism as the philosophy by which they governed their lives, actions, and policies. They appear to have relied more heavily upon the traditional approach to society, religion, and government within France, rejecting much of the substance of the Renaissance/Humanist movement. They also seem to have approved of the violence against religious minorities and believe that it was a necessary step in ridding the kingdom of a dangerous group. For this group, like the Huguenots, conflates theology and politics. In other words, religious adherence was the touchstone of political loyalty to the person of the King. Lastly, their writings are replete with a series of attacks, invective, and epithets directed against the Huguenots—in some cases, quite dramatic and flagrant. There is no resemblance to the humanist attitudes of Etienne de la Boetie, that reform should be sought by calm, reasoned withdrawal of support from tyrannical governments accompanied by a cloaked call for social, religious, and political reform.

The pattern discussed above, dealing with the reign of François I, suggests that the public image projected by the King did not match the agenda he pursued. Briefly, his public image was one of the elegant, chivalric, and Renaissance prince dedicated to the restoration of arts, letters, and the humanities. His agenda, however, was quite different, characterized, among others, by book burnings as well as burning heretics at the stake and pursuing a traditional agenda that rejected change and the new learning of the Renaissance. The Crown during the reign of François I and of his successor Henri II was willing, in its determination to eliminate heresy from

the kingdom, to form perhaps unwittingly a reactionary side that united the Crown itself with the Church hierarchy and with the Sorbonne, largely to the exclusion of the Parlements. The Protestants, on the other hand, were coalescing into an equally extreme side, organized by Calvin by the beginning of the 1530s. The Protestant teaching concerning the priesthood of all believers, the abolition of the distinction between lay and clergy, the destruction of the hierarchy of the traditional church, the view that the government need only be obeyed if it is following a godly path, and the view that the common man ought to read the Bible and participate in the rule of the church, all of these factors posed a fundamental threat to the nature of kingship and society in France at the time. Two polar opposites were thus established as combatants in the arena before the outbreak of hostilities in 1562. The Crown was willing to use any means necessary to defend its own power and the structures upon which the power rested—in this case, the power of the Crown was largely dependent upon its religious sanction as well as on tradition. This meant using directly, or approving of, reactionary individuals and forces that at least superficially, appeared to advance the cause of the Crown. One example of the reactionary-minded individuals that the Crown used—much in violation of its own projected image—was François de Lorraine, second Duc de Guise (1519-1563)—a man whose life and activities spanned the reigns of François I, Henri II, the brief reign of François II, and then Henri II in their entirety. François de Lorraine became, in fact, the acknowledged leader of the Catholic forces in the kingdom until his death on the eve of the outbreak of the Wars and the Massacre of Vassy.

The *duc d'Aumale* and *de Guise*, François de Lorraine ranks as being one of the greatest figures of the French 16th century.¹¹⁸ He was born at the Chateau de Bar on 17 February, 1519—just four years after François I had taken the French throne. His life, to put it in brief form, was

¹¹⁸ François de Lorraine, *Nouvelle Collection des Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France: Mémoires-journaux de François de Lorraine*, ed. Jean-Joseph Poujolat (Paris: Champollion-Figeac et Aimé Champollion Fils, 1839), 3.

one of military service. His adult life involved almost constant engagement in wars for the French Crown: 1543 the siege of Landrécies; 1544, the defense of Saint-Dizier; 1545, the siege of Boulogna (it was here that he received a severe facial wound that earned him ever after the nick-name of ‘Le Balafre’ or ‘Scar-face.’); 1552-53, the siege of Metz; 1554-56, battles in Italy; 1558, he took Calais and Thionville; 1562, he served as the victorious commander of the Battle of Dreux; and finally, in 1563, he was the royal commander that besieged Orléans and was assassinated there.¹¹⁹ His valor and dedication to the Crown earned him several honors, notably being named duc d’Aumale and governor of Dauphiné in 1547; Lieutenant General in 1557; and Grand Master of France in 1559 (François II).¹²⁰ Especially during the reign of Henri II, François de Lorraine was in constant and close connection with the monarch.¹²¹ Together with his brother Charles de Lorraine (1524-1574) and King Henri II (reigned 1547 to 1559), the three formed a triumvirate that effectively controlled the kingdom during the middle decade of the 16th century, setting a reactionary policy that was deeply traditional and founded upon adherence and loyalty to the Catholic faith. Closely allied to the Guise determination to remove the Protestant heresy from the kingdom was the equally strong determination to advance the power and influence of the Guise family. The Valois Crown—a dynasty that valued their public image as Renaissance princes—was willing to employ and even embrace a family whose motives were reactionary, that is opposed to innovation, change, or diversity, bent upon familial aggrandizement.

The *Memoirs* of François de Lorraine, duc de Guise, demonstrate a similar phenomenon to that represented by the Valois Crown in the attitudes and ideology they held. If the Valois wished to demonstrate their adherence to Renaissance values, all the while pursuing a much

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹²¹ Ibid, 3.

more reactionary agenda, the Guise family, on the other hand, projected an image of deep piety, largely free of Renaissance/Humanist assumptions, that cloaked a much more grasping agenda that was, of its own nature, reactionary. In this case, they sought power, money, and glory for the Guise; religion was merely a tool to achieve this end. The policy in place appears somewhat Machiavellian. Protestant and Catholic: the two sides that defined the French Wars of Religion are established between the Condé on the one hand (and their allies) and the Guise/Royalists on the other. For the Valois the symbolism and the substance of their agenda had been different, opposed to itself; for the Guise a similar trajectory can be plotted: zealous Catholicism masked a desire for power and money. In both cases, religion was a useful tool for the acquisition and maintenance of the structures of power.

Of particular interest is the way in which François de Lorraine deals with the subject of the Huguenots dissenters themselves. It is precisely here that one finds a striking similarity with the attitudes of Monluc and of the 'warrior-priest' Claude Haton. The *Memoires* themselves tend toward being more of a collection of documents, letters, edicts, laws, etc, collected by François de Lorraine and arranged more or less chronologically. As such, it is a record not so much of the personal thoughts and attitudes of the individual author, but rather of the Guise family and the movement they led during some of the crucial early years of the growth of Protestantism in France and of the outbreak of hostilities between Catholic and Protestant camps.

The journal of François de Guise does not follow precisely the same format as the other journals under study in this work. Personal thoughts and observations are relatively few. Instead of being a personal memoir as such, the journal was used essentially as a filing cabinet for documents that François wanted to keep to hand. His own comments are generally short and either precede or follow the document that he is scrutinizing.

François de Guise does not demonstrate any sense of tolerance or good will towards the Protestant minority of France. In a fashion similar to Blaise de Monluc and Claude Haton, both of whom will appear later in this work, a kind of negative rhetoric is present that provides a touch-point of commonality between all three. Striking is the fact that they all use a group of common epithets against the Protestants that are meant to denigrate and dehumanize them. Clearly, when turning to the journals themselves, the animosity between François and the Protestants is clear—a fact that corroborates the actions that he and the rest of the Guise family took towards the Protestant minority. He preserves a letter written by a Protestant that attacked the Guise family. François provides a heading for the letter that is telling. He writes that “*Vers ce temps là fut divulgué l’escrit suivant sorti de la main d’un huguenot hérétique ennemi de la maison de Guyse.*”¹²² (Around that time the following writing was publicized, coming from the hand of a heretic huguenot, enemy of the house of Guise. Author’s Translation). The point to note here is the fact that, for François, ‘heretic’ equates to enemy. He does not identify the Protestants as the enemies of the Kingdom of France, but rather of the house of Guise. If at this point, one reviews the questions that were posed at the beginning of this essay, one will see that in answer to the query about how religion and politics were united in France at the time, it will be clear that for the duc de Guise, they were fundamentally united. This of course also suggests an answer to another of those key questions, what was the state of France during the sixteenth century. Guise, and those who tended towards the Royalist/Catholic side, answered that the Huguenots represented a crisis, an ideology that challenged the fundamentals of society, religion, and government within the kingdom.

¹²² Ibid, 455.

While, as has been stated above, François duc de Guise used his journal as a filing cabinet of sorts, he also recorded his own thoughts and his views/ideology on the state of France and the wars. This approach continues in a ‘discours’ that François included dealing with the events surrounding the Massacre at Vassy on 1 March, 1562. The text narrates the train of events in great detail. Describing the Protestants, he notes that “*Il est vray, que sachant il y a long-temps, que la pluspart d’entre eulx estoient gens scandaleux, arrogans, et fort téméraires, combien qu’ils feussent calvinistes, faisant profession de suivre l’Eglise qu’ils appellent entre eulx Réformée...*”¹²³ (It is true that knowing long ago that the majority among them were scandalous people, arrogant, and very/particularly foolhardy, even though they were calvinists, claiming to follow what they called among themselves the reformed Church. Author’s Translation)

The Protestants, to reiterate, are ‘scandalous,’ ‘arrogant’, and hypocritical—claiming to belong to ‘l’église’ which they term ‘reformed.’ The assumption being that no ecclesiastical body equates to ‘Church’ except the Catholic. Later on, within the same *discours*, the author notes that the Calvinists represent something new and seditious. (“...ces nouveaulx calvinistes, qui ne preschent, en la pluspart, qu’une liberté toute pleine de sedition”).¹²⁴ (Translation : ...these new Calvinists, who preach nothing in the main but a liberty completely full of sedition). Thus, in line with the reactionary forces of Crown and Church, François de Guise sees religious pluralism (or difference?) as being essentially traitorous. What does this mean but that for Guise, as for the others within this particular group, being French equates to being Catholic and *vice versa*? Church (Roman Catholic) and state (Crown) are quite clearly conflated. This assertion is supported by a letter written by the Duc de Guise to the Cardinal of Lorraine where in the

¹²³ Ibid, 475.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 476.

‘...honor of God, service to the King and the peace of the realm...’ are linked together in one chain.¹²⁵ Again, as with Monluc, Haton, and Michel Le Riche—Catholic Church, French Crown, and state are conceived of as being in an organic whole that cannot tolerate diversity. This appears to be more reminiscent of the Medieval concept of the organic society, rather than a reflection of the newer Renaissance/humanist concept of society conceived of as a grouping of individuals participating within a ‘republic.’

François includes documents in his journal that express deep anxiety and anger about the destruction of Catholic iconography. An entry from 1561, records that “...*les Huguenots allèrent de sang-froid achever d’abatre et rompre les images qui restoient en laditte église, à raison que la commune avoit mis le feu en la maison du Patriarche, lequel fust soudainement esteint par ceux qui se disoient de l’Église réformée.* »¹²⁶ (Translation : “ ...the Huguenots, in cold blood, proceeded to knock down and destroy the images that remained in said church, because the commune had burned down the house of the Patriarch, which was suddenly put out by those of the self-professed reformed church.”) Notice that, for François de Guise, and for most of those on the Royalist/Catholic side of the Civil Wars, the Protestants were characterized not only by treason and sedition, but also by a cold-blooded destructiveness that, to the minds of men like the Guises, had no reason or rationale behind it. It was merely destruction for the sake of destruction.

The French Crown liked to portray itself as being both in step with the new learning and humanism of the Renaissance while being dependent upon a sacral or faith-based structure for the maintenance of their own power. As the *rex christianissimus*, the French monarch was pledged to unyielding loyalty to the Catholic Church and to the eradication of heresy. These two

¹²⁵ Ibid, 494.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 614.

propositions proved to be too difficult for the French Crown to balance: novelty and tradition; skepticism and doubt; Renaissance and Scholasticism—these, and other, contradictions of the age engendered a bipolarity within the center of French government. Forced to uphold both simultaneously, the French Crown adopted the external symbolism of the Renaissance while prosecuting a reactionary and totalitarian policy towards minorities and religious dissent within the Kingdom. The alternating periods of brutality and edicts of pacification betray this inherent bipolarity. The Crown was willing to use reactionary individuals to carry forward its policies and goals. François Duc de Guise was one such example—a foreigner and ambitious threat to the Crown itself who met his end by assassination in 1563. A Huguenot, Jean de Méré, killed François that year.

The Valois monarchs desired to project a Renaissance/Humanist image to the people of France as well as to the international community. The policies that they pursued, however, as well as the individuals that they employed, differed widely from the projected image. The duc de Guise, an obvious example of this discrepancy, like François I, was willing to use and condone violence against the Huguenots, and utilize a type of rhetoric that tended to dehumanize and delegitimize them as well. Throughout, the Reformed are described as being a novelty, a new innovation, and a dangerous, or treasonous, group bent on nothing but the destruction of Crown, state, and Church. Another example of an individual who fought for the traditional order was Claude Haton, a man who demonstrates a very different attitude from that of Etienne de la Boetie and those of the *middle way*. His views and actions are, however, much more in line with the policies of the Valois Crown and those who served the Crown. He possessed all of the characteristics of the more reactionary side: educated but with a rejection of humanism; the

approval of violence against religious minorities; the conflation of church and state into one, as well as the use of invective against the Protestant minority.

Claude Haton was born in 1534 in the town of Melz-sur-Seine, south-east of Paris. It lies east of Paris and close to the city of Provins. He appears to have come from a prosperous agricultural family. The family was obscure enough that little, if anything is known of his earliest years of life—up to about his 18th year. The records Claude Haton left stop in 1582. The last several years were characterized by unusually cold temperatures and the failure of harvests in the areas around Provins. This was particularly true of the year 1579 wherein Haton urged holding processions to implore the divine mercy.¹²⁷ He died and was buried at Mériot having lived 70 years.

Haton demonstrates that he was fiercely loyal to the Crown and Church of France. He notes with great care, and with some compassion, the taking of the city of Thérouanne and Hesdin by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, as well as the Battle of Renty. The devastation of these battles affected the people of Picardy with particular severity—a fact which Haton notes with a considerable degree of sympathy.¹²⁸ The growing religious dissent within the kingdom did not, however, provoke a positive response from Haton—as is clear from the journals themselves. For the year 1554, Haton notes the disturbance caused there by one Boturnus, the almoner of ‘madame de Guise,’ who claimed to be a doctor of theology, trained at Bologna. The primary problem raised by Boturnus for Haton is the fact that “*Il prenoit grand peine à semer et mettre l’erreur de Luther et Calvin...*”¹²⁹. (He took great pains to sow and disseminate the error

127 Claude Haton, *Mémoires de Claude Haton: Contenant le récit des événements accomplis de 1553 à 1582, principalement dans la Champagne*, ed. Félix Bourquelot (Paris : Imprimerie Impériale, 1857), xxxix.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 2 ff.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 7.

of Luther and Calvin...) Haton, thus, defines the protestant movement clearly as ‘error,’ to which he is opposed. This was especially troubling to Haton because the secret preaching of Boturnus was taking place at the *hotel-dieu* of Provins—an institution at the heart of the Catholic Church and in a position to influence many sick and poor people. It is also noteworthy that for Haton, religious dissent, Protestantism, even by the first half of the 1550s, was still ‘lutheran’ as opposed to Reformed or Calvinist.

Six years later, in 1560, Haton complained bitterly that the Huguenot movement was growing due to what, for him, was ignorance. He laments the secret meetings of the Huguenots who, he claimed, defamed the Catholics and brought them into ill repute around the city of Provins. He notes with distaste that “*Les catholicques, tout à l’instant, furent en tel mespris, que plusieurs d’entre eux, mal fondés en foy et de petite dévotion, laissèrent l’église romaine et des apostres pour suyvre l’église huguenoticque.*”¹³⁰

(Translation : The Catholics, all at once, were in such disfavor, that many among them, poorly established in the faith and of little devotion, left the Church of Rome and of the Apostles to follow the huguenotic church.“ Author’s Translation.)

These acts were accomplished by Protestants who were ‘unspeakably proud (arrogant)’ and ‘audacious’.¹³¹ Their acts of conversion were undertaken not for any decent or respectable end. Haton, referring to the bailiff of Provins, one Jehan Alleaume, who was a “...huguenot secret et non declare...” had as a goal to ‘oppress’ the Catholics of the city.¹³² Like Monluc and Francois de Guise, Haton also labels the Huguenots as following “...leurditte **nouvelle**

¹³⁰ Ibid, 122.

¹³¹ Ibid, 122.

¹³² Ibid, 123.

religion.”¹³³ (Translation: Their so-called **new** religion). Thus the Humanist/Protestant claim of returning to classic or Christian antiquity fell on deaf ears at least in the case of Claude Haton.

Later, for the same year (1560), Haton notes with great detail all of the *gens de bien* who went over to the Huguenot faith among whom were: the seigneurs d’Esternay, Chantaloe, de St-Symon, de Besancourt, and de la Motte; the *vidame* de Chaslons; Madame de la Motte, among others. After listing these individuals, Haton remarks that “*Les dessus nommez prindrent grande peine de séduire et tourner à laditte nouvelle prétendue religion le reste des gentishommes de ce pays...*”¹³⁴ (“Those named above took great pain to seduce and turn to this new-fangled religion the rest of the gentleman of this region...”) This list demonstrates that, at least for the area surrounding Provins, the Reformed were appealing to the landed gentry and, apparently, less to the peasantry. This could be due to the fact that Genevan Calvinism was largely dependent upon reading and a fair degree of humanist style education. It also confirms the fact that for Haton, the attraction to the Huguenot faith was akin to adultery and betrayal. Haton also laments the fact that wherever the Huguenots dominated, they were “*...sans comparaison mieux venus et honorez que les catholiques.*”¹³⁵ (“...universally better welcomed and honoured than the catholics”). He also expresses a profound concern that the accession to the French throne of Henri de Navarre or the Prince de Condé, “*...lesditz gentishommes estoient pour ce plus enclins à délaisser la religion catholique et à prendre l’hérétique...*”¹³⁶ (Translation: “...the aforementioned gentlemen were because of this more inclined to leave the catholic religion and take up the [heretical]”). Haton also notes with satisfaction that one d’Ivollé, a Jacobin of the convent in Auxerre—a man who was dedicated to the extermination of religious dissent and

¹³³ Ibid, 126.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 128.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 128.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 129.

diversity within the Kingdom—predicted that evil times would come on France because of the Reformation and how the Calvinists,

...s'eslèveroient par armes et seditions contre le roy, son estat et le repos public, désolant les villes, saccageant les églises et les temples, maltraitant les prebstres, taschant à abolir toute vraye religions, toutes lois ecclésiastiques, politiques et civiles, tous sacremens et service divine; comment par leur orgueil ilz prendroient les armes au poing pour exterminer le roy et...ensemble tout le people catholicque...¹³⁷

(Translation : “ ...would rise by force of arms and seditions against the king, his estate and the public peace, desolating the towns, sacking churches and temples, mistreating the priests, trying to abolish all true religion, all ecclesiastical law, political and civil law, all sacraments and the divine service ; how by their pride they would take up arms in their fists to exterminate the king and...all the catholic people. “)

This passage is the key to understanding the Royalist/Catholic opposition to the reformation in France. Religious diversity equated to a desire to destroy the entire social, political, and ecclesiastical structure of France in what, according to the description above, equated to a mass slaughter of all Catholics. This latter point was clearly a useful polemical tool. The earlier assessments, however, reflect the fact that Calvinism did indeed strike at the root of the essentially medieval society that existed in France at the time. Haton includes, with a certain degree of satisfaction, a selection of an anti-Huguenot sermon preached by Jehan d'Alleaume who culminated his speech by saying that “*Je voy bien que les huguenotz de ceste ville ne sont que des bestes...*”¹³⁸ (Translation: “I see well that the Huguenots of this town were nothing but beasts/animals...”). In this, the fundamental de-humanization of the Protestant minority is

¹³⁷ Ibid, 137-138.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 140.

complete—they are not fully human, outside of the ‘true’ faith—a tactic used by authoritarian regimes throughout history.

The reactionary side, thus, tended to demonstrate a series of traits that separate it rather deeply from the attitudes of Etienne de la Boetie and the ‘Middle Way.’ A rejection of humanism, the approval of violence, the conflation of church and state, as well as the use of invective against the Protestant minority tended to be the ways in which these individuals approached the conflicts of their time. In no individual is this combination of traits more clear than in the writings of Blaise de Monluc. A partial explanation to the violence of the French Wars of Religion can be found by examining the memoirs of Monluc. Instead of seeing a mere contradiction in the actions of François I, it might be more profitable to understand in François I’s reign the outworking of a Machiavellian policy of statecraft that had implications for domestic and foreign policy. For Machiavelli, the goal was the maintenance of power; the means to this end were his own Renaissance brand of *realpolitik* and a cynical use of all the organs of state and society to prop up the authority of the prince. In this kind of scheme, appearance becomes the mechanism to maintaining a pose that is acceptable to the majority of people within the body politic—in other words, look merciful, pious, generous, and kind. Look, but don’t necessarily live according to those strictures. It has been established that this kind of policy was in play during François I’s reign. A further indication of this is the people who were either directly part of the administration of the realm or rallied willingly to the royalist/catholic cause. It is my hypothesis that those who were, themselves, more traditional/conservative, as well as being more devoted to the Catholic faith were more likely to rally to the Monarch’s cause than

other, more moderate, parties. One such test case is Blaise de Monluc, a man described by Michelet as “*Monluc, homme de sang*”.¹³⁹ (Translation: Monluc, man of blood.)

Much later in life, when reminiscing in his *Memoires*, Monluc wrote “*Quant à vous, soldats, je vous recommande sur toutes choses l’obeissance que vous devez à vos capitaines, afin que vous appreniez à bien commander quelque jour.*”¹⁴⁰ (As for you, soldiers, I recommend to you above all that you be obedient to your captains, such that you yourselves learn well to command one day.) Service and obedience are thus, for Monluc, foundational to the life not only of the common soldier but also of the commander. Monluc establishes unequivocally in his *Memoires* that service to the king—unyielding, undying loyalty to the Crown—together with an equally deep commitment to Catholicism formed the basis of his life and work. Monluc wrote:

J’ay donc voulu dresser les miens, mal polis, comme sortans de la main d’un soldat et encor d’un Gascon, qui s’est tousjours plus soucié de bien faire que de bien dire...en faisant service aux Rois mes maistres, qui estoit mon seul but, fuyant tous les plaisirs et voluptez, qui destournent de la vertu et grandeur les jeunes hommes que Dieu a douez de quelques parties recommandables et qui sont sur le point de leur avancement.¹⁴¹

(Translation : “I, therefore, wanted to train my men [who were] unpolished, [such that they would know that the training was] coming from a fellow soldier and, what’s more, a Gascon, who was always more concerned with doing well rather than speaking well...and serving the kings my masters, which was my only aim, fleeing all pleasure and hedonism that distract from virtue and greatness the young men that God has endowed with some commendable capabilities, and that are just at the point of advancement.” Author’s Translation)

¹³⁹ Blaise de Monluc, *Commentaires, 1521-1576*, ed. Paul Courteault (Paris : Gallimard, 1964), ix.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 22.

Service to the king, adherence to the Catholic faith, and a Spartan life-style formed the basis of success in the estimation of Blaise de Monluc. In this way, there are echoes of the kind of chivalric and medieval ideal of service to the king and, simultaneously to the church. This kind of lifestyle produces, for him, a *gentilhomme*, as he too considered himself to be, as he climbed through the ranks leading to being named a *maréchal de France*. He writes “Encores que je sois gentil-homme, si suis-je neantmoins parvenu degré par degré, comme le plus pauvre soldat qu’aye esté de long temps en ce royaume : car je suis venu au monde fils d’un gentil-homme... »¹⁴² (Translation : “Even though I am a gentleman, if I have, nevertheless, attained degree by degree, as the poorest soldier that has for a long time been in this kingdom : it is because I am come to the world as the son of a gentleman... “ Author’s Translation) But this kind of declaration—fidelity to king and church—was not as straightforward as it might seem.

Monluc had, in fact, fallen from grace, lost his appointments, and undertaken the construction of his *Memoirs* as, in effect, a constructed and ultimately positive portrayal of his life and work.¹⁴³ The narrative has the effect of a constructed piece of, an attempt to impose his own view of his personal past upon the past itself and, by extension, upon the future. This is not uncommon in history, including famous writers like the Venerable Bede who, himself, crafted a certain kind of narrative history that gave shape and form to the view of the English past that he desired to be passed on to posterity. What is most instructive for the purposes of this essay is not, however, the fact that Monluc’s narrative is a ‘construct’ with a particular self-serving agenda. More interesting is the attitude he took towards the acts of brutality that he carried out throughout his military career and the reason *why* he carried them out.

¹⁴² Ibid, 23.

¹⁴³ Sarah Mouline, “Cruauté des guerres de religion dans les Commentaires de Blaise de Monluc,” *Lurens*. Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://www.lurens.ens.fr/travaux/litterature-du-xvie-siecle/article/commentaires-de-monluc>.

Monluc created an image for himself even during his career. He wished to be known as the scourge of the Protestants of France. Sarah Mouline notes that

Très tôt le nom de Monluc se voit auréolé de terreur, chose qu'il estime nécessaire pour faire respecter l'autorité royale. Cette terreur est due aux nombreuses exécutions qu'il orchestre, exécutions massives et visibles. En effet, il a pour usage de pendre aux arbres les Huguenots dont les corps ballants marquent son passage : "*On pouvoit cognoistre par là où j'estois passé, car par les arbres, sur les chemins, on en trouvoit les enseignes. Un pendu estonnoit plus que cent tuez.*"¹⁴⁴

(Translation: "Very early, the name of Monluc appears surrounded by an aura of terror, a fact that he considered necessary to achieve respect for the royal authority. This terror was due to numerous executions that he orchestrated, massive, visible executions. Indeed, he had the custom of hanging Huguenots on trees—the suspended bodies marking his passage: [Monluc writes] One could recognize by that that I had passed, because on the trees, on the roads, one found the signs. One hanged man stuns more than one hundred [merely] killed.") The motivation for this kind of indiscriminate brutality was, again according to Mouline, simple—one that has been suggested in this essay as well.¹⁴⁵ His cruelty was justified in his mind in that it was an attempt to uphold royal authority and ecclesiastical authority. Piety and loyalty masked a fundamentally reactionary agenda. And loyalty directed to what? It was directed to the Crown that presented itself as the great exemplar of Renaissance sophistication and new learning. The contradiction is clear.

Sarah Mouline appears to accept the fundamental accuracy of the *Commentaires* (or their essential historicity) at face value, granting, however, that they represent a constructed narrative designed to project the most favorable possible image of the author. Kevin Gould, of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

University of Nottingham, on the other hand, draws a rather different conclusion about the narratives themselves, in terms of their documentary history, as well as the conclusion(s) he arrives at regarding Monluc himself. Gould notes four foundational difficulties with the *Commentaires* as they stand. Some of these overlap with the sentiment of Mouline's approach, the question of ultimate motivation. Stated differently, is the fact that these *Commentaires* represent what amounts to a kind of personal propaganda, enough to discredit them in terms of their historical value. Another problem that appears to be largely absent from Mouline's work is the question of the documentary evolution of the text of the *Commentaires*. Gould calls this aspect of the work, rather profoundly into question.¹⁴⁶ Gould also appears to argue that Monluc's reputation as 'scourge of the Huguenots' is somewhat undeserved—perhaps a construct itself, fabricated by the inclusion of certain editorial choices to, essentially skew the reader's view of the matter. He quotes Ruble as saying "'Terrible in war, he defended Protestant rights in peacetime. Blamed for the 1572 massacres, he is said to have advised the king to consider religious toleration [...] merciless and humane, violent and measured, ardent and wise, cruel to excess, moderate to the point of clemency.'"¹⁴⁷ This appears to be a rather naïve and trusting approach. Might it not be the case the much later in life guilt began to creep in to Monluc's consciousness as he surveyed his activities in the past? That possibility must be considered. The question of redaction does not go far enough to suggest that the record of atrocities carried out by Monluc, as well as the sentiment he expressed towards the Protestants, was anything less than remarkably consistent. For those who have conquered (more or less) completely, magnanimity is easy. It is this author's contention that Monluc's actions and sentiments were in complete

¹⁴⁶ Kevin Gould, "The *Commentaires de Blaise de Monluc* in the Historiography of the French Wars of Religion," *Warwick*, Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/.../gould.doc>.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

harmony and both thoroughly in reaction against the Renaissance and Reformation movements. Monluc, in fact, harks back to a much older model of absolute loyalty to King, Church, and established order that stretches back at least as far as the *Chanson de Roland*.

The fifth book of Monluc's *Commentaires* contains a wealth of detail concerning how this man, a Marshall of France, dealt with the emergence of the Huguenot movement in Guyenne. Several considerations emerge with abundant clarity in these pages: one is the fact that, for Monluc, whatever modern historians might allege, Calvinism was considered a *religion nouvelle*. In his case, novelty was anything but a strength. He approves of that which is old, established, and traditional. Any fundamental change, Monluc strenuously opposes. Secondly, Monluc appears to have never stopped to consider the theological import or value (if indeed it had any) inherent in what the Huguenots were saying. He saw them as *political* threat to Royal Authority far more than a religious threat to established Orthodoxy—even though that, latter, point was also present. Thus for Monluc, the Huguenots were traitors to King and country—to a lesser degree, they were a threat to the religious order. But above all, they were a dangerous novelty that had no place in (traditional) France. Writing in 1561, shortly before the death of François II, Monluc, in fact, says :

Quelques mois après mon retour, j'entendois de toutes parts de terrible langages et d'audacieuses parolles, que les ministres [Huguenots] qui portoient une nouvelle foy tenoient mesmement contre l'autorité royalle. J'oyois dire qu'ils imposioient deniers ; d'autre part, qu'ils faisoient des capitaines, enrollements de soldats, assemblées aux maisons des seigneurs de ce pais qui estoient de cest religion nouvelle, ce qu'a causé tant de maux, des massacres qui se faisoient les uns sur les autres. Je voiois croistre de jour à l'autre le mal, et ne voiois personne qui se monstrast pour le Roi. J'oyois dire aussi que la pluspart de tous ceux qui se mesloyent des finances estoient de ceste religion, **car le naturel de l'homme est d'aimer les nouveautes** ; et lis pis, d'où est procedé tout le mal-heur, que les gens de justice aux parlemens, seneschaucées et autres juges abandonnoient la religion ancienne et du Roy pour prendre la nouvelle. **Voyois aussi des noms estranges de serveillans,**

diacres, concistoires, sinodes, colloques, n'ayant jamais esté defuné de telles viandes.¹⁴⁸

(Translation : “ Several months after my return, I heard from everywhere terrible speech and audacious words—that Huguenot ministers who held a new faith were likewise opposing royal authority. I heard rumors that they imposed taxes ; moreover that they were appointing captains, enrolling soldiers, holding assemblies at the houses of lords of this region who were of this new religion, which has caused so much difficulty, massacres which were carried out by some against the others. I saw evil growing from one day to the next, and didn't see anyone who declared for the king. I heard also that the majority of those who were involved with finances were caught up in this religion, because the natural condition of man is to love novelties ; worse, from which proceeds all unhappiness, that the members of the parlements, seneschals and other judges were abandoning the ancient religion of the king to take up the new one. I also saw the strange names of *supervisors, deacons, consistories, synods, colloquies*, having never tasted of such strange meats.“)

This text establishes beyond doubt several things: 1) for Monluc, Calvinism was *nouveauté*; 2) this new religion was a threat to royal authority above all; 3) the problems France was dealing with internally at least, were due to the emergence of this new religion/political threat. It seems reasonable to suggest that Monluc saw in Calvinism a socio-political threat that outweighed any particular religious threat to Roman Catholic dogma. But notice what strikes Monluc as being objectionable: the terminology of the Reformed Church just as much as its theology; its social structure. Not also the way in which King and Catholic Church are inextricably linked. This demonstrates the point that was made in this essay regarding François I

¹⁴⁸ Monluc, *Commentaires*, 472.

and the fundamentally sacral nature of his kingship. His power, and the traditional social structure of France, existed, or were perceived to exist, in a symbiotic nature with its reliance upon the Roman Catholic Church. Religious reform that extended Renaissance teaching and attitudes, as well as those of the Reformation to their logical extremes, represented a threat to the structures of society and power of France.

Soon after taking leave of the Court in 1561, Monluc found himself at the town of La Plume that was, at that moment, besieged by approximately 400 men.¹⁴⁹ Monluc reports that his arrival caused a particular reaction among the primarily Protestant inhabitants of the region: “*Et à mon arrive la peur print aux Huguenots d’eux-mesmes, de sorte que les uns se cachoient dans les caves et les autres sautoient par dessus les murailles...*”¹⁵⁰ (Upon my arrival, fear seized the Huguenots themselves, of the sort such that they hid in the caves and others jumped over the walls...Author’s Translation) All of this provoked the disapproval and even anger of the King of Navarre, Henri (the future Henri IV).¹⁵¹ Monluc’s work had, on the other hand, much pleased François II who was, at that point, still alive. The King sent Monluc to Guyenne to “put out the fire” of Protestantism that was then spreading.¹⁵²

At Estillac, where Monluc was in residence in his capacity as royal officer, he received a visit from a Huguenot minister named la Barrelle. La Barrelle informed Monluc of certain preparations made by the local Reformed community to arm themselves against attack, including the raising of a corps of armed soldiers. Monluc reacted in a typical fashion:

Ceste parole me commença à mettre en furie, et lui dis : ‘Et quelles gens et de quelle nation seront ces quatre mil hommes ?’ Alors il me respondit, ‘De ce pays icy et des

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 472.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 473.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 473-474.

¹⁵² Ibid, 475.

eglises.’ Sur quoy je luy demanday s’il avoit puissance de presanter les subjects du Roy et les mettre aux champs sans commandement du Roy ou de la Royne, qui gouverne aujourd’huy le royaume selon les Estats qui ont esté tenuz à Orléans. ‘O meschans, lui dis-je, je voy bien là où vous voulez venir : c’est de mettre le royaume en division ; vous autres, messieurs les ministres, faictes tout cecy soubz couleur de l’Evangile.’¹⁵³

(Translation: “This statement began to infuriate me, and I said to him, ‘What people and from what nation are these four thousand men?’ Then he responded to me, ‘From this region and from churches.’ Upon which I asked him if he had the authority to present the subjects of the king and place them in the field without the order of the King or of the queen, who was currently governing the kingdom according to the Estates which were held at Orleans. ‘O worthless man, I said to him, I see well your intention: it is to set the kingdom on a course of division; all of you, reverend ministers, do all of this under the cover of the Gospel.’” Author’s Translation.)

The important point is the way in which Monluc (and others) perceived Calvinism—not as much a religious threat, as a threat to law, order, government, and societal structures—a fact recognized even by Calvin himself.¹⁵⁴ Many of these same facets, combined with what can only be termed a desire to exterminate the Protestants from the body politick and ecclesiastic of the realm are also clearly apparent in writings from others in the 16th century as well. Both on the

¹⁵³ Ibid, 476-477.

¹⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne* (Paris: Meyrueis, 1859), xxi.

NB: Calvin, even as early as 1536, was well aware of how revolutionary, radical, and even destabilizing his theology and social theory were perceived to be. Despite the humble, even beseeching, quality of Calvin’s “Prefatory Address” and his insistence that radical change/revolution was not his goal, he ends his discourse by commanding the king and telling him (François I) wherein his duty lay: “*Or, c’est vostre office, Sire, de ne destourner ne vos aureilles ne vostre courage d’une si juste defense, principalement quand il est question de se grande chose: c’est asçavoir comment la gloire de Dieu sera maintenue sur terre: comment sa vérité retiedra son honneur et dignité: comment le règne de Christ demeurera en son entiere. O matière digne de vos aureilles, digne de vostre jurisdiction, digne de vostre Throne royal! Car ceste pensée fait un vray Roy, s’il se recognoist ester vray minister de Dieu au gouvernement de son royaume...*” Ibid, xliii.

Translation: “Your duty, most serene Prince, is not to shut either your ears or mind against a cause involving such mighty interests as these...The characteristic of a true sovereign is to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God. Ibid, xliii.

lower as well as on the upper ends of the political spectrum that links them ideologically with Blaise de Monluc as well as with the ultimate agenda of the Crown.

Monluc was no humanist. His agenda was one of self-aggrandizement thorough the medium of service and loyalty to the tradition structures of power. His brutality, incontestable, is proof of this. The Crown, despite its Renaissance image, was quite willing to use men like Monluc to prosecute its agenda. The journal of Monluc is similar in tone and phraseology to that of François Duc de Guise. This kind of reactionary stance can also be found in a more elevated form. Humanism and education did not always guarantee a humane approach. The life and memoirs of Monluc also help to demonstrate the historical condition of France during the *guerres* and, more broadly, during the sixteenth century. For him, just as for the Crown, membership within the French Roman Catholic Church equated to citizenship. Leaving that particular ecclesiastical fellowship and, in this case, becoming a Protestant, was treason—the abandonment of king and country. This kind of personal intractability, when magnified onto a national scale, could explain the depth of the violence as well as the long duration of the civil wars. It also illustrates just how far individuals like Monluc, and the group to which he adhered, differed from the Middle Way. It also helps to explain how radical the solution struck by Henri IV was, in the form of the *Édit de Nantes*. Despite the depth of the tri-partite division of the country, the humanists achieved a certain triumph through the Huguenot-turned-Catholic king. This *Middle Way*, made up largely of the educated humanists of France, had characteristics that made them a coherent group, as opposed to merely a collection of unique individuals. This middle way, typified so eloquently by writers like de la Boetie, Montaigne, de Navarre and François Rabelais, also came to characterize the law that ended the wars permanently and gave both of the opposing sides a measure of tolerance and dignity, the 1598 *Édit de Nantes*. The

philosophical underpinnings of this document represent a worldview that, in time, transformed Europe.

IV. The Unique Case of Guillaume and Michel Le Riche:

As this essay began, several questions appeared that are intended to help move towards a fuller understanding of the period under study. Notably among the questions is: what was the historical condition of France was during the sixteenth century? Also, to what degree were religion and politics united in France during the sixteenth century? More specifically, to what extent were they united for both the Royalist Catholics and the Genevan Reformed? Crucial for the purposes of this work, is the examination of how extensively the various ideologies of the three parties suggested here find reflection in the journals and personal writings of these important actors?

A study of Guillaume and Michel Le Riche of Poitou, father and son, can shed light on all of these questions. Beginning in 1534, Guillaume's journal reflects a man educated within the humanist tradition, who was and remained loyal to the Crown and Catholic Church, yet exercised a certain degree of (humanist) tolerance and forbearance towards the Huguenots. These attributes, over the course of the journals, lessen over the decades until, by the time of his son, Michel, they are largely gone. In fact, much that Michel says is very much in line with the pronouncements of the Catholic League.

In terms of the historical condition of France, the Le Riche journals suggest a worsening of the violence and conflict tearing the kingdom apart. This could explain, at least in part, the hardening of their attitudes against the Protestants. Clearly, for both father and son, religion and politics, as will be revealed in the course of this essay, were fully united for both. To be a good French subject of the king was to be Catholic. No other option appears to be a practical possibility. The ideologies of Humanism and Catholicism appear throughout, on a spectrum: more humanist at the commencement, more Catholic by the end.

The humanists had created a model of quiet skepticism, questioning, and a certain kind of tolerance that was dependent upon the acknowledgement of the fundamental humanity of all regardless of sectarian allegiance. This movement had formed the attitudes of thinkers like Étienne de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, Rabelais, and Montaigne. As has been demonstrated, their attempts at reform were covert—while maintaining an outward conformity to the traditional order, thinkers like these withdrew support from the brutalities of the wars around them, turned inward, and advocated a muted reform that assumed the continued existence and maintenance of the traditional organs of French government and society.

It is, however, important to note that in this time period, education did not equate with humanism as such. An interesting case that demonstrates this point can be found in the above-mentioned journal kept by Guillaume Le Riche and then continued by his son Michel Le Riche. While both were well educated, there is an initial divergence between the attitude of the father, Guillaume, and his son, Michel towards the growing religio-political conflict and civil wars in the country. While the former maintained an obvious loyalty to the established order and church, he also reported the growth of the Reformation in France with relative objectivity. There is little to no hint of outright condemnation—just curiosity and the reporting of the facts that appeared to him. This demonstrates a certain humanist tendency within Guillaume's mind. The latter, Michel, was equally well educated and prominent in the community. His part of this journal, on the other hand, is quite different. Impassioned and always clear, Michel condemns the Reformation and fills pages with restrained invective against the activities of the Huguenots. His presentation of them is thus more in line with that of Blaise de Monluc, Claude Haton, and François Duc de Guise. The primary difference is in the tone. While Monluc, Haton and Guise pour out insults and degradation upon the Protestants, using what appears to have been a fairly

standard lexicon, Michel Le Riche is, again, restrained, but firm in his opposition to the ‘hérétiques.’

The Le Riche family was prominent in Poitou, well educated, and civic minded. Father and son were attorneys who both became, eventually, *avocats du roi*, having to take the same oath of allegiance to King and Church required of all other *avocats*, such as Jean Bodin. The value in the *journaux* of the Le Riche family for this study demonstrates the spread of education and even of humanist ideas that was taking place in the context of the French Reformation era. Despite the advent of humanism, the family remained deeply committed to traditionalism religiously and politically.

Following the death of Guillaume Le Riche in 1547, the *journaux* that he began were developed by his oldest son, Michel, the *seigneur de Claveau*. Michel assumed his father’s role in more than just maintaining the journal. He studied law in the southern French city of Toulouse. Three years before the death of Françoise, his mother, in 1537, Michel returned to Saint-Maixent and, again, like his father, became mayor in April of 1534.¹⁵⁵ Two years later, he qualified as an *avocat*. When his father left office in late 1538, Michel was elevated to the post of *avocat du roi*, having to take the oath swearing allegiance to the king and the Roman Catholic Church. Not only, then, was he mayor, *avocat*, *avocat du roi*, but he was also *échevin* (alderman) of the town of Saint-Maixent.¹⁵⁶ The journals record that Michel married Marie Palustre in March 1546—a marriage that would produce fourteen children.¹⁵⁷ Michel Le Riche, like his father before him was well educated for his time and prominent in his local community. On a larger, national scale, Michel appears to have had more contacts and public profile than might at

¹⁵⁵ Guillaume and Michel Le Riche, *Journaux*, ed. A.D. de la Fontenelle de Vandoré (Saint-Maixent: Impimerie de Reversé, 1846), 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, xvi.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, xviii.

first be apparent. He was on a (relatively) familiar basis with many of the great names of his day—interestingly enough, on both sides of the great religious chasm that was dividing France into warring camps. This included a more than passing acquaintanceship with Henri IV, future King of France.¹⁵⁸ In a manner rather similar to Pierre de l'Estoile, Michel Le Riche balanced at least personal friendships with both sides. This did not protect him, however, from experiencing a brief period of captivity at the hands of the Protestant forces in July of 1547. Even though he was taken prisoner, one Captain Paillerie, a Huguenot, arranged for his safe release and return home. This appears to have been based upon the fact that he maintained good relations with the Protestants despite being a committed Catholic himself.¹⁵⁹

Michel Le Riche died a wealthy and respected man in 1587—on the eve of the most brutal and fanatical of the cycle of religious wars that had wracked France since 1560 and the Edict of Amboise. The family, once so well known in Poitou, the town of Saint-Maixent in particular, disappears from the records, apparently not surviving in the region. The journals kept by father and son provide, therefore a look into the world of the French Civil Wars from the point of view of two lawyers, officials of the Crown, who tended to resist the appeal of radicalism on either side.¹⁶⁰ The journal still in existence today does not begin in 1529 when Guillaume Le Riche began the recording of his life. The earliest surviving portion of the text dates from 1534. This covers the rest of Guillaume's life, continuing until 16 September 1587 and the death of Michel.¹⁶¹ The original text is, apparently, no longer extant.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, xvi.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, xvii.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, xxv.

¹⁶¹ The work begun by Guillaume Le Riche was continued, after 1547, by his son, Michel. Le Riche, Ibid, xxviii-xxix.

¹⁶² Ibid, xxvii.

The substance of the text itself presents a complex picture of Guillaume's internal thought-life. The French Reformation was starting to produce a great deal of strife within the country. The year in which the extant text begins, 1534, was also the year in which the infamous *affaire des placards* also took place. That event, however, is not part of the records left by Guillaume. He does, however, mention for 26 September 1534, the passing of the Count of Nassau and the Prince of Orange—both leaders within the Protestant world—through Lésignan on their way to the royal court in Paris.¹⁶³ Little else is said that would indicate any increase of concern, or indeed violence, within Guillaume's world of Saint-Maixent. He does not mention the religious conflict nor the sectarian adherence of either the Count of Nassau or the Prince of Orange. He mentions, perhaps because he was a support both of the Catholic religion as well as of the crown, the death of Antoine DuPrat, chancellor of France, in July of 1535. On the third of October of the same year, he records a Jubilee proclaimed by the Pope that all should pray for the victory of the Spanish king and other rulers of Christendom, against the Turks in Palestine.¹⁶⁴ Almost one year later, Guillaume records a similar 'jubilee' proclaimed by the pope:

September 1536, 5th of the month, "...fut publié ici le grand Jubilé octroyé par nostre Saint Père le Pape, à tous chrétiens, en priant Dieu pour la paix, jeûnant les Mercredi, Vendredi, et Samedi, après la publication faite le Dimanche...recevant le Dimanche ensuivant Corpus Domini, comme il est contenu par la bulle causée de la guerre, qui est entre le Roy et l'Empereur, afin que, par les prières des personnes, ils proviennent à bonne paix.¹⁶⁵

(Translation: "...was published here the great Jubilee declared by our Holy Father the Pope, to all Christians, praying God for peace, fasting Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, after the publication made on Sunday...receiving [on] the Sunday following the body of the Lord, as it

¹⁶³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 12.

[the command of the Pope] is contained in the bull caused by the war, that is between the king and the emperor, so that, by the prayers of many, they might come to good peace.”)

An entry for August 1536 records the elevation of his son, Michel, to the office of *avocat*, but it is short in comparison with the mention of the jubilees cited above, or with the record he provides of a great religious procession on 22 April 1537.¹⁶⁶ The purpose was to procure more favorable weather. Poitou was, at the time, suffering with drought.

While these entries represent only a few years in the life of Guillaume Le Riche, they speak volumes in terms of the man’s personal religious views. He was a traditional Catholic who revered the papacy and admired traditional Catholics. For example, he enthusiastically participated with the crowds gathered for religious processions to beseech God and the saints for assistance. As has been mentioned, great events would soon engulf all of France, yet Guillaume does not mention incidents like the *affaires des placards* (1534) or the continued advances of Protestantism either within or without the kingdom. This reticence changes rather abruptly in July of 1537 when, for the nineteenth day of that month, a monk of the order of the *Cordeliers*, preached what appeared to be an early form of French Protestantism at Poitiers. The ultimate result was, according to Guillaume *un* “...tumulte au peuple.”¹⁶⁷ (Translation: “...tumult amongst the people.”) This represents Guillaume Le Riche’s first overt reference to the new protestant movement—at least in the portion of the text that is remaining—and is followed rather swiftly by a mention for 29 August, 1537 that “...*un nommé Guillemar, marchand, demeurant à Poitiers, fit amende honorable, Durant la procession, qui fut faite par le Clergé dudit lieu, pour avoir mal parlé et suivi la secte Luthérienne, selon la sentence contre lui donnée, par le*

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 15.

lieutenant audit lieu".¹⁶⁸ (Translation : " ...one named Guillemar, merchant, living in Poitiers, made the honourable amends, during the procession, which was made by the clergy of said place, for having spoken badly and having followed the Lutheran sect, according to the sentence given against him, by the lieutenant of that place.") Le Riche's choice of terms, *luthérienne*, is telling. While the earliest years of the French Reformation followed the writings of Martin Luther, this gave way to the more reformed teachings of John Calvin. The first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, foundational text for the Huguenot movement, had been published in 1536 with a preface Calvin wrote addressed to the French king, François I. Le Riche, apparently, associated all opinions that deviated from the orthodox Roman Catholic norm as *Lutheran*.

This identification of heresy with Lutheranism, coupled with the association of heresy with treason, continues in the work of Guillaume Le Riche. His entries for July and August of 1537 demonstrate this. He does not comment, one way or the other, upon the ultimate justice of Catholic cause or upon the rightness of the *tumulte* that arose in Poitiers as a result of the preaching of the unknown Cordelier. The tone of neutrality in these regards is striking and, again, reminiscent of the tone found throughout the work of Pierre de L'Estoile. The journalistic tone of Guillaume's writing continues for an incident that happened two months after the August riots in Poitiers. On the 3 October 1537, the suffragan bishop of Poitiers came to perform confirmations of the children in the city. He mentions the fact that, at the same time, an injunction from the vicar of Saint Saturnin was promulgated "...*de publier un arrest au prosne, lequel arrest concerne les sectaires de l'hérésie de Luther, pour lesquels l'on publie chacun Dimanche, ès Paroisses de cette ville, une monition emanée de l'officiat de Poitiers, contre*

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 17.

lesdits Luthériens, et ceux qui les cèlent“.¹⁶⁹ (Translation: “ ...to publish an immediate halt to preaching, which halt concerns the sectarians of the heresy of Luther, for which one publishes every Sunday, from parishes of this town, a warning emanating from the office at Poitiers, against these Lutherans, and those who conceal/hide them.“ Author’s Translation) He reports the facts coldly, even dispassionately. They merely happened and Guillaume does not add his opinion into the entry.

The neutral tone, when reporting the events of the progressing French Reformation changes by the time we reach 1541. There had been changes within the reformed movement since the entries for 1537. Calvin had fled France for Strasbourg in 1538 and there, while preaching and teaching in a variety of churches (Temple Neuf, Saint Nicholas, Sainte-Madeleine), had published the second edition of his *Institutes*, appearing in 1539. The following year, 1540, Calvin published the *Commentary on Romans*, further explicating his views on theology and church reform. Simultaneously, Geneva, which had forced Calvin to leave several years before, was in the process of recalling him—a process agreed to by Strasbourg. In September of 1541, Calvin did in fact leave his work in Strasbourg with some reluctance and returned to Geneva to continue his work of reformation there.

The Reformation movement was, thus, intensifying and growing inside and outside of France. The first generation of reformers, like Melanchton and Luther, were beginning to fade. Luther died in 1546. While he had been, on several key points, deeply opposed to some of the tenets of the thinking of Calvin and the Swiss Reformation, Melanchthon was less so. Regardless of this fact, the Reformation in France was becoming more organized and theologically cohesive, the *Institutes* forming the basis for the theological movement. The Protestants in France were

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 17-18.

also becoming increasingly emboldened, a fact reflected by an entry Guillaume makes for 15 May, 1541 “...[quelques] méchants couppèrent le bras de l’ymage Nostre-Dame, qui estoit à l’entrée de l’Eglise Nostre-Dame-la Grant, de Poitiers, desquels l’on n’a peu avoir coignissance. Aussi un libraire, pour quelque hérésie, fut condamné à estre brûlé audit Poitiers...». ¹⁷⁰ (Translation : “ ...some villains cut off the arm of the image of Our Lady, which was at the entrance of the church of Our Lady the Great, at Poitiers, who were never caught. Also a bookseller was condemned to be burned at Poitiers for some heresy... “ Author’s translation).

The change of tone from the earlier entries is undeniable. Those who cut the arms off the stature of the Madonna were *méchants*. Strangely, despite the growth of the Reformation during the 1540s, Guillaume makes scant mention of this fact, referring instead to political developments, the weather, and notable events in Poitou. The neglect of the more radical reformation changes on 25 March, 1543, Easter Day. The *procureur du roy*, one Arembert, arrived with a body of soldiers to seize a Norman Protestant preacher. This preacher had “...*presché tout le Caresme audit lieu, contre les ministres de l’Eglise [Romaine], et ceremonies d’icelle, exhortant le people de non prier les saints, ni porter chandelles et autres plusieurs choses, que l’on n’avoit accoustumé prescher*” ¹⁷¹ (Translation: “...preached all Lent at said place, against the ministers of the Roman church, and ceremonies at the same place, exhorting the people to not pray to the saints, neither carry tapers and many other things, that one wasn’t accustomed to preach.”) This demonstrates that the Reformation movement then spreading in Poitou and, obviously, Normandy, was not Lutheran in its theological orientation. Early Lutheranism, especially, was in no way averse to candles or ecclesiastical art. Even though it did discourage direct prayer to the saints, it insisted on using the saints as examples of virtuous, god-pleasing lives. The young 25-

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 34-35.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 49-50.

year-old Norman preacher was clearly reflecting the theological views of Calvin and the Genevan Reformation that, in a way much more thorough than Luther, suppressed all of these elements.

Clearly, Guillaume Le Riche was a loyal Catholic and servant of the French Crown as *avocat du roi*. Given his education, however, which tended to incline him towards the humanists, Guillaume's journals do not represent a source of severe hatred or condemnation for a group that he clearly regarded as being aberrant and heretical. Guillaume died in 1547. His son, Michel, took up the writing of the journal. Thus the first part of the work, that part written by Guillaume, may be seen as a reflection of the educated person's view of the Reformation during the early years—covering most of the reign of François I. Coincidentally, the journal's transition to the hand of Michel Le Riche comes in the very year that François I died (31 March 1547), and the royal succession passed to Henri II. The entire journal is, however, not extant. The portion still available to historians begins on 26 March 1569, ending on the 23 of March 1572. This period misses several key points, such as the Edict of Amboise, the Massacre at Vassy, and ends just several months before the infamous Saint Bartholomew's day massacre in August of 1572. The value to the historian is the fact that while Guillaume's portion of the journal covers the earliest years, the journals of Michel Le Riche cover the era of Protestant ascendancy. During this time the religious future of France was very much in doubt. Michel expresses the alarm felt by many at the prospect of growing 'heresy' within the kingdom in the first journal entry,

I. Mars 1559. Le 26, l'hériésie éclata encore plus fort dans cette ville (de Saint-Maixent), au jour de Pasques de l'année 1559, à cause d'un certain estranger nommé Pinet ou Pivet, qui, depuis un an, s'estoit retiré à Noirt, où il preschoit l'hériésie, dans les maison particulières en cachette...à une grande multitude de

commun peuple, qui le suivoient et faisoient que les Officiers de justice n'osoient l'empescher, et néanmoins enfin le chassèrent de leur ville.¹⁷²

(Translation: “March, 1559. The 26th, heresy exploded again even more strongly in this town (of Saint Maixent), on the day of Easter of the year 1559, because of a stranger named Pinet or Pivet who, a year ago, had moved to Noirt, where he preached heresy, secretly in private houses ...to a great multitude of the common people who followed him and made sure that the officers of justice didn't dare impede him but nevertheless managed finally to drive him from their town.” Author's translation.)

In line with the history of the Genevan brand of Protestantism in the Netherlands, Scotland, and England, the description given by Michel Le Riche indicates that French Reformed preaching was occurring in secret. Typically, this happened in the homes of those who were sympathetic to the cause, possibly/probably supplied with preachers trained in Geneva. The officers of the law warned him not to preach again. Michel Le Riche notes with some surprise that, despite this warning, “...le Dimanche d'après Pasques, ledit Piavet, accompagné de diverses personnes armées, alla prescher au bourg d'Azay (sur Thouet), où plusieurs personnes de la ville de Saint-Maixent assistèrent, nonobstant lesdictes inhibitions et défenses »¹⁷³ (Translation: “...Sunday after Easter, the aforementioned Piavet, accompanied by a diversity of armed people, went to preach at the town of Azay (on Thouet), where many people of the town of Saint-Maixent attended, notwithstanding the orders that they not do such.” Author's Translation.) This localized incident echoes and presents in microcosm the trajectory of events throughout the

¹⁷² Ibid, 77-78.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 79.

entire kingdom: the exercise of religious diversity within the realm brought about a stern rebuke from the local structures of governance and power. Those who were participating in the Protestant meetings were, by necessity, putting themselves outside of the norm of French society of the time. This placed them outside the normal power structures, on the periphery of society itself. The threat of violence implicit in the bureaucracy's response led to defiance by those on the periphery of power and the continuation of the forbidden activity—except this time with the presence of weapons.

Michel Le Riche continues to note the fact that other preachers continued to hold sermons, including one that appears to have incited violence and iconoclasm in Poitiers.¹⁷⁴ The cycle of violence-response-violence continued and was noted by Michel Le Riche. He notes that : “Sur le bruit de ces presches estant parvenus aux oreilles du Roy, il donna ordre à M. du Lude, Gouverneur du Poitou, de les réprimer et de punir sévèrement, tant lesdicts prescheurs que ceux qui les faisoient venir et favorisoient.”¹⁷⁵ (Translation : ”When the noise of these sermons reached the ears of the King, he gave orders to Monsieur du Lude, governor of Poitou, to suppress them and to punish severely, both the preachers and those who invited them and favored them.”) Clearly, the increase of violence emanating from the French reformation and the reaction to it was escalating and, in a way different from the rather calm, journalistic reserve of Guillaume, Michel demonstrates a growing distaste for the Protestants. He even appears to show the kind of tendencies that would, eventually, help to form the Catholic League—in that he disapproves not only of the Reformation, but also the efforts of the government, fairly early on, to balance the two parties within the Kingdom. Michel remarks the existence and activities of the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561 by saying that it “...augmenta beaucoup l’audace des

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 80.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

hérétiques...”¹⁷⁶ (Translation: “...increased much the audacity of the heretics.”) In the same way, Michel appears to dismiss the Edict of January in his entry for May 1562, he sees it only as means to further spread heresy in the Kingdom.¹⁷⁷ His ire is further provoked by the way in which the Huguenots ‘profaned’ the Sacrament and attacked the relics of the saints in the Church at Saint-Maixent and the surrounding countryside.¹⁷⁸

While the growth of the Reformation during the reign of François I attracted relatively little attention from Guillaume, Michel’s part of the journal bristles with condemnations of the ‘heretics’ and is made up, nearly entirely, of entries dealing with the religious conflict, the Civil Wars, and the failed attempts of the Crown to bring about some kind of solution. He notes, with apparent satisfaction in December, 1566 that “*En ce mois, un Jacobin fort docte, preschoit l’avent dans l’Abbaye (de Saint-Maixent), ayant pris pour sujet de ses sermons, l’épître de Saint-Paul aux Ephésians, et réfutoit doctement les erreurs des hérétiques, touchant l’Eucharistie, la puissance du Pape, les jeûnes et mérites des bonnes œuvres.*”¹⁷⁹

(Translation: “In this month, a highly educated Jacobin, was preaching Advent in the Abbey [of Saint Maixent], having taken for the subject of his sermons the epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians, and was refuting in an educated way the errors of the heretics concerning the Eucharist, the power of the Pope, fasts and the merits of good works.” Author’s Translation.)

This constitutes Michel’s belief that the Protestants were indeed in the wrong—politically and theologically. His judgment is traditional and Catholic—there must, he reckons, be prayer to

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 85.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 92.

the saints, fasting, and good works in order for the religious expression of the people to be correct.

It is also noteworthy that the theological difference(s) presented by the Huguenots quickly becomes, in his mind, treason against the French state. This too is in line with the attitude of the Crown and its representatives like Monluc and Haton, as well as in other Catholic powers within France, like the Guise family. In January 1568, Michel describes the conflict at La Rochelle as ‘rebellion’ and a “...nouvelle guerre pour la religion.’¹⁸⁰ (Translation:...new war for religion.) To define it thus is to conflate religion and politics, church and state—to attack one, for Michel Le Riche, is to attack the other. This tends to confirm one of the contentions of this piece that the French state, centered as it was on the Crown and church, had a fundamentally sacral nature. Church and state were two sides of the same coin.

The journal continues to darken in tone against the Reformed. In 1568 Michel records the ‘*fureur*’ of the heretics who destroyed churches and abbies.¹⁸¹ He goes on to declare that these acts of destruction demonstrated “...le beau zèle de ces prétendus réformés, qui non seulement veulent effacer tous les restes de la véritable et ancienne religion, ou la profaner par d’autres usages, sans penser à en conserver un seul, pour faire l’exercice de leur prétendue religion.”¹⁸² (Translation: “...the great zeal of these so-called reformed, who not only want to erase all the traces of the true and ancient religion, or profane it by other means, without thinking to preserve a single thing, to make free exercise of their so-called religion”). Here again, Le Riche begins to conform to the examples set forth by Monluc, Haton, and Guise. The Protestants represent a ‘new’ religion that is merely destructive. No thought is given to their claims. He represents any

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 92.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 96.

¹⁸² Ibid, 97.

innovation or alteration in religious terms as being *ipso facto* bad. Since the Reformation runs contrary to the established Church, it must, by necessity, run contrary to the established government, whose authority rests upon the Catholic Church for ultimate legitimization.

The third volume of the collection of Le Riche Journals continues from April 1572 until December 1578. Interestingly, the events surrounding the marriage of Henri de Navarre to Marguerite de Valois are not mentioned for the month of August, 1572, nor the subsequent massacre on Saint Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 1572. In an entry for early September 1572, Michel does make mention of Clément Vidard, a canon of the Church, who brought word of those who had been killed at Paris during the massacre. Michel lists the names in a desultory fashion, with no commentary.¹⁸³ What is, for the modern historian, *the* great turning point in the Wars of Religion warrants scarcely a mention in Le Riche's journal—a stunning silence in the face of a human tragedy.

Other sufferings did not escape Michel Le Riche's notice. He remarks the devastation caused in the surrounding country-side surrounding Saint-Maixent, 1573; the wounded returning from the siege of La Rochelle (1573); the falling ill of the Abbot of Saint-Maixent, M. d'Uzés in what Le Riche defines as being an "...extrême maladie" (October 1573); and the fact that the summer of 1573 was too wet while the winter of 1574 was too warm "...il n'a commence à geler que depuis lundi dernier, 1 de ce mois [de fevrier]" (1574).¹⁸⁴ (Translation: "...it didn't begin to freeze until just since Monday last, first of the month of February.") These details demonstrate the care with which Michel le Riche observed his world on both a large and small scale, condemned heresy and the advent of the Reformation in France, and expressed concern over the

¹⁸³ Ibid, 109-110.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 132-152.

personal and regional tragedies of the Kingdom. What he chose to express, and what he did not become significant. The lack of concern expressed for the Protestants is in line with Monluc, Haton, and Guise and suggest a dehumanization. Interestingly enough, references to the Reformation, and its progress in France, decline rather sharply in Michel's journal after the years 1572-73, a fact that supports the contention that the Huguenot movement never recovered after the Saint-Barthélemy.

As has been noted the references to the spread of the reformation in France within the journal of Michel Le Riche decline sharply while at the same time, his journal replaces overtly religious entries with references to the military operations between the Crown/Catholic and Huguenot sides. These are reported in a journalistic way—a tone that, once the Saint Barthélemy is passed, comes to dominate the narrative once again. He notes, with apparent *sang-froid* the fact that the King declared a peace in May of 1576 between the two sides. Le Riche is referring directly to the Edict of Beaulieu (6 May 1576). Word reached Saint-Maixent on 15 May. Le Riche records no reaction whatsoever—a tantalizingly vague entry that leaves the historian wondering where he stood on this matter. Later on, in an entry dated 22 May, 1576, Le Riche notes that “Le mardi 22 mai, nous reçumes l’édit du roi en forme, sur ladite paix et pacification des troubles du royaume, publié en parlement, le 14 de ce mois, et lequel édit nous fimes publier en cette ville judicieusement et d’abondance, à cri public et son de trompe, par cette ville, où fut chanté le *Te Deum Laudamus*, par les Catholiques.... »¹⁸⁵

(Translation: “Tuesday 22 May, we received the paper copy of the edict of the king, dealing with the said peace and pacification of the troubles of the kingdom, published in the parlement the 14th of this month, and which edict we judiciously published in this town in abundance, by the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 204.

public crier and the sound of the trumpet, throughout this town, where the Te Deum Laudamus, was sung by the Catholics...”)

Le Riche greeted the peace of Beaulieu with some enthusiasm even if the arrival of the King of Navarre, the future Henri IV was not. Le Riche appears to have been distressed when the king permitted that reformed preaching begin again at Saint-Maixent and throughout Poitou.¹⁸⁶ In a subsequent entry for 15 July, 1576, Le Riche notes with displeasure that “...un minister de la prétendue religion, prescha en pleine rue...au grand scandale du peuple, qui pensa que ce fut pour renouveler une sédition ; au moyen de quoi, toute la nuit suivante, je fis la patrouille par la ville“¹⁸⁷ (Translation : “...a minister of the self-proclaimed religion preached in the middle of the street...to the great scandal of the people, who thought that this was to renew sedition ; because of which, all the following night, I conducted the patrol of the town... “Author’s Translation).

This entry, again, seems to indicate that for Le Riche, and for the Catholic/Royalist side, theological difference equated to political treason. Treason, therefore, had to be both guarded against and rooted out. Herein lies the central argument of this work: the fact that the structures of power in France were built upon an essentially theological, even theocratic, foundation. To threaten the religious bases of this superstructure was to threaten all of society—political as well as religious, social as well as legal. Circumstances forced the Crown, despite its attempts to appear current and in-step with Renaissance learning and humanism, to react brutally against the Protestants because they constituted a threat to the very power that legitimized their reign. Externals of Renaissance urbanity masked a reactionary policy that would use any means necessary to bolster their power. Those who supported the Crown tended to see reality in this

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 266.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 268.

stark dichotomy of black and white, Catholic and Protestant, *une foi, une loi, un roi*. The imposition of a totalitarian absolute was the order of the day. This appears to be confirmed when on November 13, 1582, Le Riche records that “Le mardi 13, fut publié judicieusement, en la ville de Poitiers, une lettre du roi...suivant le calendrier ecclésiastique, ordonné par le pape, envoyé aux rois et princes chretiens, sont retranchés 10 jours de cette année... “¹⁸⁸ (Translation: “Tuesday the 13th, was judiciously published, at the town of Poitiers, a letter of the king...following the ecclesiastical calendar, set in order by the pope, sent to christian kings and princes, resetting the days of the year by ten”). He is referring, of course, to the revision of the calendar and the loss of ten days, meaning that, as Le Riche records, Christmas of that year would fall on the 15th of December as opposed to the 25th. The interesting fact to note is that for Le Riche, Crown, Pope, and Government—Church and State, in effect—amounted to the same thing. Three years later, in April of 1585, Michel notes that Henri III had sent a declaration to the people of Poitiers that “...il assurait aimer uniquement la noblesse et l’affection qu’il a à la religion catholique et à remédier à soulager son peuple.”¹⁸⁹ (Translation: ...he [the king] assured everyone that he loved the nobility and the affection that he had for the catholic religion as well as to remediate and comfort his people). The Catholic League, then actively opposing Henri III as being too lenient upon the Protestants in the Kingdom, may have been the (real) intended audience of this declaration, assuring them of his uncompromising support for the traditional order. Whatever the case, Michel Le Riche recorded the event with some satisfaction.

What does the historian make of the journals of Guillaume and Michel Le Riche? They serve as an interesting test case: two men, father and son, who served within the traditional structures of power in France personally and professionally. Personally, they were loyal to the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 570.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 398.

Catholic Church and to the king; professionally, they were dependent upon the Crown for their employment and station in life. The apparent early humanistic tendencies of Guillaume, who mentioned the reformation in France barely at all, gives way to almost Leaguist tendencies in his son who, by the 1580s makes absolutely no distinction between Church and State. The Protestants do not so much represent a theological challenge in the abstract—as moderns might see it—but rather as nothing less than treason, a challenge to the state and very fabric of French life. This is the traditional viewpoint, not that of the humanistic Renaissance that tended to be skeptical of religion—along with everything else.

Skepticism in religious terms was only a part of a broader Renaissance pattern that emerged within Europe during the sixteenth century. As the Reformation movement advanced, monarchs across western and central Europe assumed control of their territorial churches and, as a concomitant, also appropriated the wealth of the churches to enhance the royal treasury. As early as 1527, the Swedish *riksdag* eliminated the authority of the papacy within the realm and adopted Lutheranism as the state religion. A more well-known example is that of Henry VIII's England. In 1534, following a series of parliamentary acts, the English followed in the footsteps of the Swedes and abolished the authority of the pope in the kingdom. In both cases, the monarch became the *summus episcopus* of the state church. More spectacularly than in the Swedish case, however, Henry VIII appropriated vast amounts of land, property, and wealth from the old Catholic establishments of England and moved those funds to the Crown treasuries. There was, following these kinds of developments, a need to maintain royal control over the Church not only for spiritual reasons, but also for financial reasons. France, while never following in the footsteps of Protestantism as such, also developed a legal structure that gave the monarchs large control over the *Église Gallicane*, the Church in France. The *Concordat of Bologna* is the foundational

text that made the French monarchs, in some ways, the *summus episcopus*, of the Catholic Church within his territories. This document, however, had its roots in the 1438 *Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges*, that laid the foundations for royal power in ecclesiastical affairs. It also suggests a certain level of corruption within the French Church that mirrored the kinds of corrupt practices seen within the Holy Roman Empire and England, so attacked by the Protestant reformers. The fact of corruption within the French Church and the ongoing need for the Crown to exercise authority over it for spiritual and, no doubt, financial reasons also goes to demonstrate the state of the country during the sixteenth century—one of the key questions posed at the beginning of this essay.

As this essay began, several questions appeared that are intended to help move towards a fuller understanding of the period of the *guerres*, that is, what was the historical condition of France was during the sixteenth century? Also, to what degree were religion and politics united in France during the sixteenth century? More specifically, to what extent were they united for both the Royalist Catholics and the Genevan Reformed? Crucial for the purposes of this work, is the examination of how extensively the various ideologies of the three parties suggested here find reflection in the journals and personal writings of these important actors?

A study of Guillaume and Michel Le Riche of Poitou, father and son, has shed light on these questions. Guillaume's journal reflects a man educated within the humanist tradition, who was and remained loyal to the Crown and Catholic Church, yet exercised a certain degree of (humanist) tolerance and forbearance towards the Huguenots. These attributes, over the course of the journals, lessen over the decades until, by the time of his son, Michel, they are largely gone. In fact, much that Michel says is very much in line with the pronouncements of the Catholic League.

In terms of the historical condition of France, the Le Riche journals suggest a worsening of the violence and conflict tearing the kingdom apart. This could explain, at least in part, the hardening of their attitudes against the Protestants. Clearly, for both father and son, religion and politics, as will be revealed in the course of this essay, were fully united for both. To be a good French subject of the king was to be Catholic. No other option appears to be a practical possibility. The ideologies of Humanism and Catholicism appear throughout, on a spectrum: more humanist at the commencement, more Catholic by the end—a direction mirrored by the reign of Henri IV. A Protestant, raised in a home heavily influenced by the humanist movement, Henri converted to Catholicism to secure his throne but, in the form of the *Édit de Nantes*, granted a limited tolerance to the Huguenots of his realm. This enlightened approach, echoing the recommendations of humanists like Etienne de la Boetie, gave France nearly a century of religious peace and prosperity.

V. Royal Authority and the Church: The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges, Concordat of Bologna, Catherine de Medici, and the Catholic League.

The humanists, typified by writers like Marguerite de Navarre, Michel de Montaigne, and Etienne de la Boetie, had called for reform in a way that was cloaked. By withdrawing from the conflict, focusing on the writings of antiquity, and crafting their own works that advocated reform in a non-violent way, the humanists set the stage for both the later *Édit de Nantes*, as well as the settlement that eventually ended the war. The decades before the 1598 *Édit*, however, did not see the overt triumph of the humanist approach. It appears as if the humanist victory, in the form of the *Édit* was growing almost secretly. This is especially apparent as one examines the reign of the first king to deal with the *guerres* and the concomitant Protestant reformation. The latter, a movement away from the traditional hierarchy and structures of the Roman Catholic Church, threatened the ancient power structures of Church and Crown that tended to lend legitimacy and authority to the other. The roots of this go much further back in history than the Reformation that began in 1517. The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) and the Concordat of Bologna (1516) had placed into the hands of the French monarchs power over the established Church. This implies, of course, not only power but also wealth that flowed from the Church into royal coffers.

The Renaissance and the Reformation had started an attack upon both received tradition in the Church as well as the absolute authority of the Crown, as has been demonstrated by examining writings by humanist authors like Jean Bodin. The humanists themselves tended to oppose an uncritical acceptance of tradition or authority and their influence had grown in the years before the *guerres* reaching into the heart of the royal court. Marguerite de Navarre, sister to King François I himself, is a good example. A humanist and author, she called traditional

structures of society into question, while maintaining her loyalty to traditional forms. She never, in short, called for a violent overthrow of the French government nor of society.

This discussion brings us to the historical condition of France at the time as well as the degree to which religion and politics combined. The reaction of the Crown and Catholic Church to the Huguenot challenge suggests that the latter threatened not merely a theological construct, but also constructs of power, authority, and society. If true, this helps to explain the extreme violence of the Catholic/Royalist side towards the Huguenot challenge. The *Édit de Nantes* (1598), which ended the *guerres*, struck a moderate tone in that it permitted a tolerant, humanist co-existence of the Catholic and Protestant religions within France. This followed very much the kind of recommendations for society, religion, and politics made by Boetie, Montaigne, de Navarre, Rabelais, Bodin, and others.

François I (1515-1547), however, was caught between the two worlds of ancient French tradition and the new learning of the Renaissance and Reformation. On the one hand the *sacre* and tradition insisted that the French kings occupy a sacral role. This facet of the French royal system was an inheritance from the past, exemplified by the exalted title born by François I *rex christianissimus*. No other European monarch at the time carried such an exalted title. This is the first point: François was a sacral king, not a strictly secular ruler as is the case in the modern world. Secondly, François was a product of his own time and education, i.e. the Renaissance and a mother whose motto was *libris et liberis* (books and children). Louise de Savoie had overseen that both François and Marguerite received good educations that included reading the classics and humanist works along with literature that was more traditional. Marguerite and François had, as tutors, two noted humanists, François Demoulin and François de Rochefort, as well as the

philosopher Robert Hurault.¹⁹⁰ The fact that they both received, from Louise de Savoie, a humanist education demonstrates an important point, François, just as much as Marguerite, was deeply familiar with the new spirit of the Renaissance and all that it implied. Marguerite, of the two, was the sibling that tended to take the humanist education that she had received and develop it more fully as her life progressed. François I, on the other hand, seems to have remained caught between the bipolarity of traditionalism and innovation; the deeply religious past and expectations imposed upon French Kings and the reformist, de-mythologizing tendencies of the humanists. One of the best examples of the way in which François I violated his own projected image of humanist and, simultaneously, faithful son of the church is the Concordat of Bologna.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the Papacy had agreed to the *Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges* (1438) that established the rights and privileges of the French Church. While it did place considerable power over the Church in the hands of the French kings it left other aspects of traditional Catholicism in place. The Pope maintained all spiritual power and commanded spiritual obedience, but the French kings had all institutional and practical control over the structure of the church—a bifurcation of the powers and structures of the church in a metaphysical and practical sense. The key point to keep in mind is the fact that the French kings were still, in theory at least, subject to the pope in terms of spiritual obedience—this fact must be borne in mind. The central goal (for the Crown) was the maintenance of its own structural independence and power over the Papacy. Removed from force in 1461 by king Louis XI, the

¹⁹⁰ ...[Louise] gave her daughter (and her son) a far broader and more liberal education than was usual for noblewomen (or noble men) in her day. Indeed, she treated Marguerite and François equally. From the outset they had the same tutors and followed the same course of studies. Both learned Spanish and Italian from their mother, who conversed with them in those languages. Two humanist scholars and churchmen, François Demoulin and François de Rochefort, abbot of Saint-Mesmin near Orléans, taught them Latin and biblical history. Another 'érudit', Robert Hurault, 'gave Marguerite her first lessons in philosophy' (Jourda, *Marguerite d'Angoulême*, 1:25-26)." Cholakian and Cholakian, 16-17.

Papacy, no doubt, did not wish to see any such measure return over the large and prosperous French Church.

The new and *avant garde* as well as the reactionary and absolutist tendencies of François I combined and formed a common theme throughout his life and his reign as King of France. At the Battle of Marignano (September 1515), François won the day and brought about the surrender of Milan. By October of 1515, François was a hero and conqueror who received a victor's welcome in Milan.¹⁹¹ In December of 1515, negotiations began between François I and Pope Leo X to deal not only with the new but tenuous power of France Italy, but also to renegotiate the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438). The result of these negotiations was to reaffirm the French King's ability to appoint officials in the church as well as collecting a tithe from the church. Like the later English "Act in Restraint of Appeals" (1534) the Concordat of Bologna (1516) limited the ability of the French church to take complaints beyond the Alps—they had to stay, in short, within France. The pope, however, garnered the ability to draw the incomes of the entire Gallican Church to himself. The outlines of this agreement seem relatively innocuous and reflecting a reality that had existed already for since the Pragmatic Sanction. What is often overlooked is the question of emphasis: the Pope, arguably, was relegated to the position of tax collector—almost certainly guaranteed to reduce his already low popularity within France. The king maintained the genuine power of tithing and appointing of prelates. But all of this was within the framework of presenting himself as a completely obedient son of the Church—the *rex christianissimus*, in fact. Religion, clearly, was to serve his needs—in terms of power, psychological control, revenue—and to maintain the traditional structure upon which his power rested. That which he presented in public—the king as loyal son of the church and

¹⁹¹ "Francis entered Milan in triumph on 11 October, 1515 and remained there until the end of the month, when he moved to Vigevano..." Knecht, *Francis I*, 47.

defender of the faith—is not in harmony with the fundamental policies François was advocating. To express it more simply, the symbols of the regime of François I did not match the ideological substance.

The Concordat of Bologna, which maintained the power of the French king over much of the income and all of the appointments of the Church in France, reinstated much of what the Papacy had so disliked in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges of 1438—it was, in effect, a step backward in time, not necessarily forward. François I was using the Church to maintain his own power and authority over the people of the kingdom and to the ultimate detriment of the Church and Papacy itself. The substance, then, of his agenda was cynical—the church was a tool for him to use. The symbolism—in order to pacify a deeply traditional population—was quite different. To all public appearances, François was a loyal and humble son of the Church—a Church that had, since 1302 and the promulgation of *Unam Sanctam*, insisted that outside of the Roman Church there is no salvation; the Roman Church, in turn, is presided over by the vicar of Christ on Earth, the Pope. To be Catholic in its fullest sense demands a submission to the authority of the Roman Pontiffs—a point maintained even in the Pragmatic Sanction (1438). Thus in order to appear religious, by necessity, François I had to conform outwardly to the rights and rituals of the Church and to papal authority. To maintain his power, he subordinated the Church in France to himself and use it towards his ends.

François I, for these reasons, could not permit the full flowering of humanism nor of the Reformation within his realm. To do so would be, in the traditional view of French government, society, and religion, to dissolve the whole. While other monarchs, like Henry VIII of England, or the Electors of the German Empire, such as Friederich III of Saxony, saw in the Reformation a way in which to absorb the national churches, effectively, into the state, François I did not.

Protestantism appears to have been nothing but a threat to his power and wealth, as well as the intricate network of obligation that existed between the Crown of France and the provincial nobility.

François I died in 1547, with the issues of Reformation and brewing civil war far from resolved. The need to maintain royal control over the French Church did not end with the old king's death. From the death of François II in 1560 until her death in 1589, Catherine de Medici, widow of Henri II, mother of Charles IX and Henri III, tried to keep a crumbling kingdom together and manage the conflicts of the Civil Wars. An essay of this scope is not the proper venue for a lengthy examination of her role, but it is, nonetheless, appropriate to briefly address her contributions to the period. Catherine's task was to uphold the royal authority, and maintain her sons upon the throne. She perceived several groups to be threats. Examining her letters, and those of her son Henri III, it becomes clear that the moderate side of humanists and intellectuals posed no danger to Catherine and her goals—which remained largely the same as François I. Their calls for reform were muted and always predicated upon loyalty to the traditional order of Crown and Church. Catherine, herself a daughter of the Italian Renaissance and Florentine society, supported the arts and humanists in France, adopting many of the external symbols of their work while insisting upon the maintenance of the official *status quo*. The Valois Chapel, commissioned by the Queen Mother and many other architectural and artistic projects demonstrate her propensity to adopt the outward forms of the new learning. She strove to maintain the traditional social structures of France by whatever means she deemed expedient. Sometimes this meant compromise and tolerance, shown by the Colloquy of Poissy (1561), organized by herself and a noted moderate at court, Michel de l'Hopital, that attempted to bridge the gap between the two religious camps. The Edict of January, 1562, also represented an

attempt to grant the Huguenots a limited kind of toleration, freedom of conscience, and freedom of worship, within certain bounds, while at the same time attempting to satisfy more hard-line elements within the Catholic camp.

One example of the way in which Catherine's humanist public image conflicted with the internal substance of her policies comes from the writings of Jacques Auguste de Thou (1553-1617). This Parisian historian left a gripping account of the Saint-Barthélemy that provides insight into how the Royal Court approach the massacre and how the Parisians perceived it. The involvement of Catherine de Medici and of Charles IX stands out clearly. He writes

So it was determined to exterminate all the Protestants and the plan was approved **by the queen**. They discussed for some time whether they should make an exception of the King of Navarre and the prince of Condé. All agreed that the King of Navarre should be spared by reason of the royal dignity and the new alliance. The duke of Guise, who was put in full command of the enterprise, summoned by night several captains of the Catholic Swiss mercenaries from the five little canots, and some commanders of French companies, and told them that it was the will of the king that, according to God's will, they should take vengeance on the band of rebels while they had the beasts in the toils. Victory was easy and the booty great and to be obtained without danger. The signal to commence the massacre should be given **by the bell of the palace**, and the marks by which they should recognize each other in the darkness were a bit of white linen tied around the left arm and a white cross on the hat.¹⁹²

The occasion that gave rise, of course, to the general outbreak of the massacre itself was the assassination of Admiral de Coligny. This surprise attack set the chain of events into motion that culminated in a mass slaughter of the Protestant minority in Paris and throughout the provinces. De Thou notes that the dead body of Coligny was treated in a particularly gruesome way—gruesome, but not without a certain method:

As some children were in the act of throwing the body [of Coligny] into the river, it was dragged out and placed upon the gibbet of Montfaucon, where it hung by

¹⁹² Jacques Auguste De Thou, "Histoire des choses arrivees de son temps," *Juniata*, Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://jcsites.juniata.edu/faculty/tuten/stbarts.html>.

the feet in chains of iron: and they they built a fire beneath, by which he was burned without being consumed; so that he was, so to speak, tortured with all the elements, since he was killed upon the earth, thrown into the water, placed upon the fire, and finally put to hang in the air. After he had served for several days as a spectacle to gratify the **hate** of many and **arouse the indignation of many others**, who reckoned that this fury of the people would cost the king and France many sorrowful day[s], François de Montmorency, who was nearly related to the dead man, and still more his friend, and who moreover had escaped the danger in time, had him taken by night from the gibbet by trusty men and carried to Chantilly, where he was buried in the chapel.¹⁹³

The polished, humanist image of Catherine de Medici and Charles IX—along with that of the entire Valois court—vanishes in the light of this contemporary description of the massacre and, more importantly, the motivation behind it. The goal was the removal of the Protestant minority from the realm—discussion, toleration, and freedom of conscience were the state goals, the massacre represented the reality. Also note the way in which the Court appears to have wanted to incite public rage and vigilante action against the Protestants. Clearly public symbolism and reactionary substance were in disharmony. Also clear is the fact that the basic pattern established by François I held steady during the reigns of François II, Henri II, Charles IX, and Henri III. In fact, a new paradigm only emerged once Henri IV assumed the throne in 1589. One can find the proof of this in the *Édit de Nantes*, and its provision for relative tolerance for both sides—the legal establishment of the humanist ‘middle way’ for the entire kingdom.

The Valois monarchs of France were not the only ones to meet the new learning of the Renaissance and the religious reforms of the Protestant movement with a mixture of attraction and revulsion. Powerful noble families picked sides in the conflict and found themselves at the heart of the *guerres*. While the Coligny and de Montmorency families tended largely towards the Huguenot camp, other great aristocratic clans sided with the Catholic/Royalist side. One of the

¹⁹³Ibid.

most important families to do so came from outside the French borders of the sixteenth century. They were the powerful and ambitious Guise family.

The Guise family, deeply Catholic and Royalist, played a decisive role in the political decisions pursued by Catherine de Medici and the other successors of François I. Powerful, ambitious, and receiving support, financial and moral, from the ardent Catholic monarch of Spain, Philip II, the Guise family, from their base in Lorraine, sought to dominate the government of France. By the early 1560s, Catherine de Medici faced the triple challenge of Duc François de Guise, Commander of the Royal Armies; Charles, in charge of the royal exchequer; and of course the Cardinal de Guise representing a powerful force within the Church. It is probable that Catherine feared that these men would dominate her weak sons and ultimately attempt to seize the throne itself.

It is fascinating to note that by 1561, the year of the Colloquy of Poissy, Catherine had entered into negotiations with the Huguenot leaders Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and the Prince de Condé, as well as the reformed Bourbon family, leaders of the Protestant forces within France. The Colloquy itself seems to suggest that Catherine was attempting to bring about stability to the realm. But why would she negotiate with the Reformed against the much more powerful Catholic forces in the Kingdom? It is possible that Catherine, fearing the growing influence of the Guise family over Royal politics, army, treasury, and Church, came to believe that the only way to counterbalance that ever-growing and grasping influence was to appeal to the Reformed side, a minority indeed, but a formidable one. The Guise family retaliated, staging a series of executions of Calvinists and, through the Cardinal de Lorraine, reported to the Pontiff. The effect upon Catherine, a loyal Catholic, was decisive: she reversed course, abandoned the policy of toleration, and pursued the more traditional policies of

oppression. That Catherine was, herself, a traditionalist Catholic is clear from her correspondence. Her letters reveal that she found the Huguenots to be a destabilizing force within the kingdom. She insisted, for example, in a letter of 19 August, 1570 to Pope Pius V, that her desire was united with that of the king: “...*le desire qu’il a toujours eu de conserver sa seule religion et l’honneur de Dieu...*”¹⁹⁴ (Translation: ...the desire that he always had to preserve his only religion and the honour of God...)

The balancing act carried out by Catherine was, in some ways, puzzling. An Italian Catholic--queen of France, relative of Popes and prelates--she sought to balance the radical elements of Reform (Huguenots) on the one hand, and Catholicism on the other. Why did she follow this course? There are several possible reasons. Catherine was, above all, pragmatic and intelligent. She may have suspected that her sons were not strong men, as her husband Henri II had been. In peaceful times, this may have been tolerable. From 1559, Philip II of Spain pressed France from without. He was an arch-catholic, ruler of the Netherlands and the vast Spanish Empire in the New World. He also backed the power-hungry Guise family from Lorraine. The Huguenots applied pressure from the inside. They were challenging the traditional social structures, government, and Church of France.

While much of the focus of this essay has been upon the literate, or higher, echelons of sixteenth century French society, the lower classes also became involved within the struggle that engulfed the nation. The Huguenot movement attracted some members of the lower orders. Typically, however, the peasantry of France remained loyal to the Crown and the Roman Catholic Church. From the orders of the commoners came the Catholic League that stridently

¹⁹⁴ Catherine de Medici, Reine de France, *Lettres de Catherine de Medicis*, ed. Hector de la Ferrière (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1887), 331.

opposed the Protestants in France and, eventually, the monarchy that, in their view, vacillated too much between a flirtation with humanist toleration and Catholic orthodoxy. By the 1580s, the Catholic League demonstrated as much dislike for the Crown as for the Huguenots, fighting instead for a return to a completely Catholic society along the lines of France before the Renaissance and Reformation.

The Catholic League emerged as a force during the 1560s. These self-appointed defenders of the Roman Catholic Church and all that was traditional in French society for the concept of “un roi, une loi, une foi.” The League came to pose a grave threat to the Crown itself whenever the Crown attempted to end the civil wars through any kind of toleration. This fact caused the crown, in particular the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, profound unease.

Catherine de Medici may have felt forced by necessity to try to balance external and internal threats in an attempt to save the kingdom not only from these grave dangers, but also from the danger posed by the weakness of her sons, the kings of France from 1559 to the assassination of Henri III by a Leaguer in 1588. Machiavellian pragmatism characterized Catherine’s efforts. That is to say, she did not seem deeply concerned with religion for its own sake, but rather as an instrument of power and societal control and stability. She was willing to try toleration of the Huguenot side. However, when this provoked the unrestrained ire of the League, thus threatening the stability of the Crown, she reversed course and reverted to the more repressive policies of the past.

The Catholic League was a reactionary force within the kingdom, but far more so, at least ideologically, than the Crown. They opposed attempts to alter the traditional religion or structure of France. The Huguenots were thus enemies that had to be driven from the realm. Any who

offered an olive branch or any kind of toleration to these hated enemies of France, according to the Leaguers, deserved full hatred. Ironically, in their zeal to defend the true faith, Crown, and social structure of France they became, in themselves, radicals who threatened to contribute to the dissolution of French society, presided over by a nervous Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici. Their dislike of Henri III is manifest in many of the pamphlets and tracts that they published. Preserved and digitized by Brigham-Young University, a collection of pamphlets published between 1550 and 1643 provide rich detail into how the wars were viewed at the popular level, especially within the Parisian context.¹⁹⁵ The League approved disobedience to the King and gave divine sanction to it. In *Advis de Rome: Tire des Lettres de l'Évesque du Mans escrire le Quinziesme de Mars à Henri, jadis Roy de France* (1589), an anonymous Leaguer writes, that: "...il [Dieu] en remist tout le mal sur vous...[Q]ue parce que vostre Maiesté n'obéissoit á Dieu et ne se reconcilioit à son église, Dieu permettroit vos subiets se bander contre vous."¹⁹⁶ (Translation: "...he [God] has placed all the bad things on you...because your Majesty didn't obey God and didn't reconcile his church, God permitted your subjects to band together against you.")

In the *Advertissement aux Catholiques sur la Bulle de nostre Saint Père touchant l'excommunication de Henry de Valois*, the League states that: "Vous avez au troiesme point, qu'Henry, et les siens ont encouru l'excommunication et les autres peines ecclesiastique des sacrés canons."¹⁹⁷ (Translation: « You have, as concerns the third point, that Henri, and his own, have incurred excommunication and the other ecclesiastical penalties of the sacred laws of

¹⁹⁵ The complete collection referenced here can be found at <http://lib.byu.edu/collections/french-political-pamphlets/>.

¹⁹⁶ Author Unknown, "Advis de Rome: Tiré des Lettres de l'Évesque du Mans escrire le Quinziesme de Mars à Henri, jadis Roy de France," *Brigham Young University*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu>.

¹⁹⁷ Author Unknown, "Advertissement aux Catholiques sur la Bulle de nostre Saint Père touchant l'excommunication de Henry de Valois," *Brigham Young University*. Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://lib.byu.edu/collections/french-political-pamphlets/>.

the church. »Author’s Translation.) In other words, Henri had no one to blame but himself for the divine and human wrath descending upon him.

By contrast, the Huguenots themselves were seen not as fellow Frenchmen who happened to be of a different religious opinion, but something far worse and far more sinister. The pamphlet “*Advertissement, Ou Epistre à Messieurs de Paris, et autres Catholiques de France: sur les Nouveaux Desseings d’aucuns Rebelles, et seditieux, nagueres discover, Lesquels sous Couleur et Pretext qu’ils Disent en Vouloir aux Ecclesiastiques, et Vouloir Reformer le Royaume, Conspirent contre le Roy, et Son Estat*” published in the 1570s, defines the Huguenots thus : “*Car de penser...qu’un Huguenot ferme (?) qui avec Judas a fait la Cène, et a conspiré contre Dieu et contre les magistrats, tant spirituels que temporels, soit jamais bien affectionné ny à l’Église fidèle et Catholique, ny au Roy trèschrestien, c’est se tromper plus que de moitié : d’autant que le Diable s’est saisy de luy...*”¹⁹⁸ (Translation : “To think...that a firm Huguenot who made the Lord’s Supper with Judas, and conspired against God and against the magistrates, both spiritual and temporal, would ever be well disposed towards the faithful Catholic Church nor the most Christian King, is to be fooled well beyond any reasonable limit : especially because the Devil has seized him...” Author’s Translation.) Linked with Judas Iscariot, one of the most infamous betrayers in history, and accused of being rebellious to Church, State, and King, the League insisted that the Reformed in France were in the employ of dark spiritual forces, bent on destruction.

¹⁹⁸ Author Unknown, “Advertissement, Ou Epistre à Messieurs de Paris, et autres Catholiques de France: sur les Nouveaux Desseings d’aucuns Rebelles, et seditieux, nagueres discover, Lesquels sous Couleur et Pretext qu’ils Disent en Vouloir aux Ecclesiastiques, et Vouloir Reformer le Royaume, Conspirent contre le Roy, et Son Estat,” *Brigham Young University*. Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/FrenchPolPa/id/5575>.

The French kings, including François I, bore the sobriquet *rex christianissimus* (most Christian king). The *sacre*, or coronation ceremony, traditionally held at Reims Cathedral north-east of Paris, made it equally plain that the French kings were God's anointed with special gifts and privileges not shared by any other subject of the kingdom. Since the *sacre* was centuries old by the time of the coronation of François I in 1515, this demonstrates how deeply intertwined French Crown and church truly were. This means that the French Crown could not rule by any kind of social contract between ruler and ruled for the simple reason that, according to the traditional beliefs held as the 16th century dawned, the King ruled by the fiat of almighty God alone. It is not too much to say that in a way similar to the Russian tsars or even the Ottoman Sultans (caliph and commander of the faithful of Islam), the French kings assumed a kind of sacerdotal role. This sacral kingship that typified the French monarchy represents the traditional substance of that monarchy. It was an ancient structure even by the time of the coronation of François I and was much older than the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the nascent modernity that was developing throughout the western European cultural zone.

The triple conflict was established: reactionary forces of Crown and Catholic Church; the moderate humanists who, in the fashion of de la Boetie, abstained from supporting the regime openly or fundamentally advancing the Protestant cause; and the Radical Reformed who represented, in some ways, a movement as totalitarian in its goals as the Crown/Church. By the beginning of the French Civil Wars, which I date to 1562, the massacre at Vassy, there were three parties, broadly speaking, within the Kingdom: on the one extreme, there were the reactionary forces of Crown and Church that had adopted the external symbolism of the new understandings. They left the essential substance of their institutions unchanged. In the center, there were men and women like Michel de Montaigne, Marguerite de Navarre, François

Rabelais, and many of the other poets (Labé, Marot, Ronsard) of the time. They represented much of the substance of the new understanding, like the emphasis on the individual, but did not call for shattering apart existing societal institutions. They called rather for reform within existing guidelines. On the opposite extreme, the Genevan Reformation movement that united the symbols and the substance of reform, and openly advocated the destruction of the old order and the reconstituting of Crown, church and society following the model of the primitive church, the Bible, and the *Institutes* of John Calvin. This division tells us that the state of France in the mid-sixteenth century was complex, defying a facile description of the wars as merely a conflict between Protestants and Catholics.

The stage was set for the conflict that would become the French Wars of Religion, lasting from 1562 until the Edict of Nantes, in 1598. Each cycle of atrocity, war, and temporary abatement of hostilities was concluded with a treaty could not bring about any kind of lasting peace. The Civil Wars produced a level of violence that is staggering. Catherine appears to have been divided in her own thoughts regarding not only how to solve the problem of multiple religions within and whether she should use a humanist approach to *rapprochement* between the various parties, or resort to traditional methods of violence and intimidation. The combination of her Florentine personal history, the influence of Macchiavelli, her devotion to the Catholic Church and the French Crown created in Catherine a political approach that was confused. When the appeal to the rational or humanist approach failed, Catherine abandoned it. Her policies, often accomplished through her sons the kings of France, would become increasingly reactionary.

The violence increased during the 1570s and 1580s, placing more strain onto an already strained kingdom. The state of France at this time was grave. Internal fighting and ideological

differences threatened to undo the fabric of society, power, privilege, and religion. The Valois monarchs showed little ability to maneuver successfully through the cycle of conflict and peace which continued unabated. As a result of the continued instability and volatility of France at the time, the humanists, like Jean Bodin who wrote his *Heptaplomeres* in 1588, and Michel de Montaigne, who published his essays in the Spring of 1580, continued to work for change through their writings. Gradually, out of this middle way, a more active political party, the *Politiques*, emerged, calling for a pragmatic, non-sectarian end to the *guerres*. In this way, humanism surfaced again as a viable path towards a settlement. The embodiment of this humanist settlement, however, had to wait until the *Édit de Nantes*, promulgated in 1598. Not revoked until the reign of Louis XIV in 1685, this document, and the House of Bourbon, permitted France to rebuild within the framework of a relative tolerance between the great religious confessions, Catholic and Protestant.

The 1570s and 1580s, in many ways, were the nadir of the *guerres*. They were also the years that seem to have witnessed the death of the kind of humanist approach advocated by Etienne de la Boetie. At first glance, it would even appear that the self-imposed internal exile of the humanists had failed. But through the continued circulation of Boetie's writings, as well as those of Rabelais, de Navarre, Montaigne, and Bodin, to name but a few, the influence of humanism grew. By the 1598 promulgation of the *Édit*, the Middle way had reached its zenith and a kind of triumph that would influence France for centuries to come.

The humanists, such as Etienne de la Boetie, had called for reform in a way that was cloaked. By withdrawing from the conflict, focusing on the writings of antiquity, and crafting their own works that advocated reform in a non-violent way, the humanists set the stage for both the later *Edit de Nantes*, as well as the settlement that eventually ended the war. The decades

before the 1598 *Édit*, however, did not see the overt triumph of the humanist approach. It appears as if the humanist victory, in the form of the *Édit*, was growing almost secretly. This is especially apparent as one examines the reign of the first king to deal with the *guerres* and the concomitant Protestant reformation. The latter, a movement away from the traditional hierarchy and structures of the Roman Catholic Church, threatened the ancient power structures of Church and Crown that tended to lend legitimacy and authority to the other. The roots of this go much further back in history than the Reformation that began in 1517. The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) and the Concordat of Bologna (1516) had placed into the hands of the French monarchs power over the established Church. This implies, of course, not only power but also wealth that flowed from the Church into royal coffers.

This discussion brings us to the historical condition of France at the time as well as the degree to which religion and politics combined. The reaction of the Crown and Catholic Church to the Huguenot challenge suggests that the latter threatened not merely a theological construct, but also constructs of power, authority, and society. If true, this helps to explain the extreme violence of the Catholic/Royalist side towards the Huguenot challenge. The *Édit de Nantes* (1598), which ended the *guerres*, struck a moderate tone in that it permitted a tolerant, humanist co-existence of the Catholic and Protestant religions within France. This followed very much the kind of recommendations for society, religion, and politics made by Boetie, Montaigne, de Navarre, Rabelais, Bodin, and others. The fact that the Crown, in the person of Henri IV, adopted some of the central humanist tendencies of the Middle Way, embodied in his *Édit de Nantes*, suggests strongly that it saw no other practical solution to the *guerres*. The *Édit* stated something remarkable regarding the Huguenots, specifically, it guaranteed to them “...*la liberté de leurs*

consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes...”¹⁹⁹ Simultaneously, the *édit* restored Catholicism wherever its practice had been suppressed.²⁰⁰ This was not the approach taken to the warring parties in the wars of religion for the nearly forty years of constant strife and violence that had passed. This pacific and enlightened settlement, based in reason and on a more secular understanding of life and the world, came from the humanists. They made up the third, middle, way between the Huguenot radicals on the one hand, and the Royalist Catholic reactionaries on the other.

¹⁹⁹ *Édit de Nantes (1598)*, 2.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

VI. Calvin and the French Reformation:

This essay attempts to move towards answers to various important questions about the era. For example, through a prosopological examination of the lives of various French men and women of the time, one can move toward a greater understanding of what the historical condition of France was during the sixteenth century. Their lives, and even more importantly, their thoughts, recording for posterity in journals, letters, and other written texts, give us a rare glimpse into the minds of those who acted in this great drama. This essay will also help to shed light on the issue of the union of religion and politics in France during the sixteenth century. To what extent were they united for both the Royalist Catholics and the Genevan Reformed? Crucial for the purposes of this work, is the examination of how extensively the various ideologies of the three parties suggested here find reflection in the journals and personal writings of these important actors?

An examination of the life and thought of John Calvin (1509-1564) helps to answer these questions, particularly with regard to the Huguenots. It also helps to explain why, as the sixteenth century waned, King Henri IV promulgated the *Édit de Nantes* that would establish tolerance for both major confessions within France. The structure of the *Édit*, however, made it clear that while free, after a fashion, to worship and believe as they pleased, the Huguenots, as much as the radical Catholic League, would not have the chance to dominate French politics again. The French Protestant movement did not, in itself, seek tolerance or coexistence with the Catholic majority. Rather, it sought to demolish the old France and rebuild it in the image of Geneva, adopted home of John Calvin and center of the Calvinist Reformation. The fundamental implications of Calvin's version of Reformation thought were profound. While Luther had been relatively muted on the subject of societal transformation, siding with the nobles of the German Empire against the peasants in 1525 during the Peasants' War, Calvinist theology was openly and literally iconoclastic. It sought

the future by way of the past; the re-creation of the contemporary church by recapturing the early church. Calvinism, like the sixteenth century Catholic church, refused to brook any competitors. It too was fundamentally imperialist in its dogma and inflexible in its approach. In this way, it is profoundly different from the humanism of writers like Boetie, Montaigne, Bodin, Rabelais, and de Navarre even though it shared some of the same Renaissance/humanist origins with them.

One should note that while the Catholics and the Genevan Reformed were both inflexible and imperialist in their views, there were also significant differences. These differences generated, within the French context, the violence of the *guerres* between 1560 and 1598. For Calvin, and those of the Reformed faith that followed his lead, religion and politics were united in a fundamental way. This way was, however, different from that of the Royalist/Catholic party. Instead of seeing authority as descending from God to a divinely appointed monarch and church, authority resided with the Bible, as the Word of God, and to the generality of the elect, i.e. those who faithfully adhered to the Reformed Church. Within this organization there was not a hierarchy as such, but rather a shared priesthood of all believers. The Reformed Church was governed by a series of interlocking boards, or committees, made up of ruling elders (lay) and teaching elders (clergy), in a pyramidal structure that culminated in the national synod. Like the Royalist/Catholic party, the Reformed believed that there was only one approach possible to God, society, and the church. Compromise was an approach that was rarely included within their writings. Because both sides were exclusivist to a high degree, and because compromise at a fundamental level was not possible, the result was a series of brutal wars that would tear France apart. Thus, politics and religion came to be intertwined for the Huguenots just as much as for the Royalist/Catholics. The *mentalité* of the Reformed, however, also had its origins within the new learning and understandings of the

Renaissance. Their understanding of that learning pushed it to an extreme and became the radical vanguard of Renaissance thinking.

It was within the Protestant Reformation that the words of the moderate humanists—Boetie, Erasmus, Budé, and More, to name several—fell on deaf ears. Boetie had called for a passive kind of reform that withdrew support from a tyrannical government. Erasmus, Budé, and More, as examples, had called for moderate reform within the Catholic Church that left the fundamental structures of the old Church intact. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, together with their various followers rejected the serious attempts at peace, combined with reform, that Boetie had urged so eloquently. Most notable for the French context was the life and work of one individual scholar, humanist, and radical, John Calvin.

In Calvin, France met, perhaps for the first time, with a thinker who constructed an ideological framework that united the symbolism and the substance of reform. The results were quite literally explosive. The Calvinist movement challenged traditional religion and the structures of power within the French state. In the case of France, these were the *Huguenots*, or followers of John Calvin's Reformed Church. His background was middle class; his hometown was the cathedral city of Noyon. Born in 1509, Calvin was a young child when Luther hammered up his famous 95 Theses for debate on the door of the *Schlosskirche* in Wittenberg. Calvin, having been born only 8 years before the onset of the Reformation, grew up with Reformation thought within his cultural and religious milieu. This is especially true during his days at university, first in Paris, studying theology at the Sorbonne, and then at Bourges, where he studied Law. Calvin returned to Paris to study around the year 1532, just two years before the *affaire des placards*, and it was during this time that he was converted to the cause of the

Reformation and the restructuring of church and society in light of the primitive church.²⁰¹ Calvin would spend the remainder of his life outside of France—for a time in Strasbourg, and then the bulk of his career in the city of Geneva where he undertook the Reformation not only of the Genevan Church, but also of the city-state itself.²⁰²

Theologically, Calvin's reforms were no less sweeping and revolutionary than his views on politics and society. His thought is massive and well organized—too vast to condense appropriately into a work of this nature. It allows for no other path for religion or society than its own—in this way he is just as intransigent as the Royalist/Catholic side that formed the other half of the traditional dichotomy that divided France during the Civil Wars. In his “Prefatory Address” (1536), dedicated to François I, he wrote:

Contemplez d'autre part nos adversaires (je parle de l'estat des Prestres, à l'aveu et appétit desquels tous les autres nous contrarient): et regardez un petit avec moy de quelle affection ils sont menez. Ils se permettent aisément à eux et aux autres, d'ignorer, négliger et mespriser la vraye religion, qui nous est enseignée par l'Escriture, et qui devoit ester résolue et arrestee entre tous: et pensent qu'il n'y a pas grand intérêt quelle foy chacun tient, ou ne tient pas de Dieu et de Christ : mais que par foy (comme ils disent) enveloppée, il submettent son sens au jugement de l'Eglise. Et ne se soucient pas beaucoup s'il advient que la gloire de Dieu soit polluée par blasphèmes tous évidens, moyennant que personne ne sonne mot contre l'autorité de nostremère sainte Eglise: c'est-à-dire, selon leur intention, du siège romain. Pourquoi combattent-ils d'une telle rigueur et rudesse pour la Messe, le Purgatoire, les pèlerinages et tels fatras ...Pourquoy, di-je, sinon pourtant que leur ventre leur est pour dieu, la cuisine pour religion lesquels ostez, non-seulement ils ne pensent pas qu'ils puissent estre Chrestiens, mais ne pensent plus estre hommes...²⁰³

(Translation: Contemplate on the other hand our adversaries (I mean the estate of the priesthood, by whose appetite and will others set themselves contrary to us), and look a little with me to discover by what zeal they are led. They readily permit both themselves and others to be ignorant of, to neglect and despise the true religion which is taught us by the Scriptures and which ought

²⁰¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), xii.

²⁰² *Ibid*, xiii.

²⁰³ John Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne* (Paris: Meyrueis, 1859), xlvi

to be firm and held fast amongst all: and think that there is not great interest as to what faith each one holds, or does not hold, of God and of Christ; but enveloped in faith as they say, they submit their meanings to the judgment of the Church. And they don't worry much if that brings about a pollution of the glory of God by clearly evident blasphemies, resulting in no one daring to raise a word against the authority of our mother the holy Church: that is to say according to their meaning, of the Roman see. Why do they combat with such vigour and rudeness for the Mass, Purgatory, pilgrimages and such nonsense, such that they deny true piety ...Why, say I, if not because their stomach is their idol, the kitchen their religion, without which, not only do they think they can't be Christian, but they think they can no longer be men" Author's Translation.)

The sentiments expressed in this brief passage demonstrate that Calvin and the Reformed religion were as unwilling to compromise or cooperate with their enemies as the Royalists/Catholic forces were. Such sentiments also hint at the ways in which Calvinism was indeed essentially radical, even revolutionary in regards to the fundamental structures of French government, society, and church. John Calvin was neither a priest nor a prelate. His training did include a good amount of theology, but was primarily in the field of the law. Despite this, Calvin felt no hesitation calling into question one of the most powerful international forces of his day, the Roman Catholic Church. His actions and life, his writings and preaching, reveal a man who united the symbolism of the new understanding and the substance and began interacting with the world as an independent, or existential *ego*. Not bound by tradition, the feudal order, or the church, Calvin crafted his own unique view of the same and asserted not only that it was valid, but the only correct understanding to be adopted by Christians.

Inherent also in the writings of Calvin are ideas that further advance the new concept of individualism. His theology, unlike the ancient theology of Rome, was itself purely

individualistic in nature in that belief, saving faith, was strictly personal. The external community around the believer could not advance it.²⁰⁴ His reforms also necessitated education not only for males, but also for females; the ability to read was necessary because all Christians, regardless of their gender or class, had the responsibility to read the Sacred Scriptures for themselves. Salvation was, to a large degree based upon the correct knowledge of Scripture. Calvin placed this injunction within the context of what God was saying to the individual. Governance of the Church was taken out of the hands of prelates, and placed in the hands of laymen and clergy, defined as being essentially equals, to be governed in a collegial or presbyterial fashion. This was as close as the Church had come to some sort of democratic organization, arguably, in its history, since the earliest days of the church in Roman-occupied Palestine.

Those who were attracted to Calvinism were also from very diverse backgrounds, making it difficult to assert that the Huguenot movement in France or the Low Countries was essentially a class struggle. Admiral de Coligny, for example, as well as members of the Montmorency family, were from the nobility. Many people from the agricultural and laboring classes of the south of France were neither wealthy, nor highly educated. Many converts to Reformed Christianity in France also came from the urban merchant cohort in cities like La Rochelle and Toulouse. This suggests an appeal that goes beyond class distinction. It is also difficult to suggest that the motivations for conversion were purely economic, given the laws against it. Those who assert that the movement was essentially a proto-capitalist one must juxtapose that over against both the harsh laws forbidding the practice of, for example, lending money at interest, with the great popularity of the movement.

²⁰⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (English Version), 365.

Equally important, in terms of society and gender issues, Calvin ‘de-sacralized’ marriage, and insisted that it was the remedy for human sexual impulses and an estate blessed by God. While maintaining that virginity is acceptable to the very few who have received the ability to remain continent, it is not to be sought, or glorified, as the Roman Church traditionally had. By contrast, marriage is the normal state of humanity to be sought by laity and clergy. He redefined chastity as existing within the bond of marriage (defined as being obligatory), faithfulness to the spouse alone, as opposed to permanent celibacy.²⁰⁵ The marital embrace was thus not restricted to the procreation of children and should be used and enjoyed with balance and moderation.²⁰⁶

The Roman Catholic Church had taught the virtues of fasting, abstinence, and the penitential life. It upheld the way of penitence and self-denial as the superior way of life, fit for the religious, meaning the priests, monks, and nuns. It was not well suited however for the common people who could only aspire to these virtues, at best. Granting that not all people followed these paths, certainly, this was still the doctrine presented to them by the established church. How surprising then, it must have been for the men and women of the sixteenth century to read:

Now then, if we consider for what end he created food, we shall find that he consulted not only for our necessity, but also for our enjoyment and delight. Thus, in clothing, the end was, in addition to necessity, comeliness and honor; and in herbs, fruits, and trees, besides their various uses, gracefulness of appearance and sweetness of smell. Were it not so, the prophet would not enumerate among the mercies of God ‘wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine’ (Psalm 104:15)...Has the Lord adorned flowers with all the sense of smell, and shall it be unlawful for us to

²⁰⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* (English Version), 257-258.

²⁰⁶ This may have challenged the traditional views held by French society at the time that had accepted the notion of monarchs and clergy with open mistresses, and a view of marital fidelity that may have differed somewhat from that presented by Calvin. This is clear from the official writings of the time that assume as a matter of course that monarchs and prelates would have mistresses, as well as more ordinary sources that reflect the view of the lower orders of society. The play *Eugène*, by Etienne Jodelle, reports comically the amorous machinations of prelates and the rather lax sexual morality of a lower class Parisian ‘housewife.’ Etienne Jodelle, “Eugène” in *Four French Renaissance Plays*, ed. Arthur Stabler (Place of Publication not listed: Washington State University, 1978).

enjoy that beauty and this odor? What? Has he not so distinguished colors as to make some more agreeable than others? Has he not given qualities to gold and silver, ivory and marble, thereby rendering them precious above other metals and stones? In short, has he not given many things a value without having any necessary use? Have done, then, with that inhuman philosophy which, in allowing no use of the creatures but for necessity, not only deprives us of the lawful fruit of the divine beneficence, but cannot be realized without depriving man of all his sense and reducing him to a block.²⁰⁷

Calvin's views of government also demand closer scrutiny. He demanded that the people respect and honor legitimate authority and insisted that all such governmental authority derives its legitimacy from God.²⁰⁸ Yet, he also expresses a certain kind of relativism in regards to the structure of government in each land, republic, kingdom, or empire.²⁰⁹ He also calls for rulers to exhibit prudence with finances and public funds, saying that they are nothing less than the 'blood of the people' and are not the monarch's private property.²¹⁰ Following the teaching of the primitive church, Calvin requires his followers to render obedience to the king or other authority even if they are cruel or tyrannical and yet the obedience that the ruler can expect of his subjects is conditional.²¹¹ If the ruler attempts to require Christians to break or violate a higher law of God, then the Christian must render obedience to God and not man.

Calvin, most importantly, held a conditional view of kingship held in France during the sixteenth century. The *sacre*, discussed above, in which the king was anointed in a priestly fashion and given communion in both kinds, helps to demonstrate the sacral role of kingship accepted by Crown and Church in France during this time. Calvin argued that God does indeed place the king, to whom obedience is due, upon the throne. His role, however, is to provide justice and protect the body politic and the church. In this, Calvin is more or less in harmony

²⁰⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* (English Version), 470.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 972.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 974.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 978.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 987.

with the teaching of the Catholic Church and Crown of France. However, he does not stop here. Obedience is predicated upon a higher obedience to the will and law of God.²¹²

This obedience, predicated upon the explicit commands of God, is not merely a theological statement meant to stay within the quiet confines of a church or school. This represents something of a call to action—a justification of war against rulers, ecclesiastical or political, who attempt to rule in a tyrannical and ungodly way. Godly, in this case, is defined as conforming to the theological understandings of the Reformed Church. Calvin expresses this even more succinctly in his ‘One Hundred Aphorisms’ appended to the *Institutes*. He writes that

The people owe to the magistrate: 1) reverence...2) Obedience...3) That love which will lead us to pray to God for his prosperity...[But] God restrains the fury of tyrants; either by raising up from among their own subjects open avengers, who rid the people of their tyranny, or by employing for that purpose the rage of men whose thoughts and contrivances are totally different, thus overturning one tyranny by means of another...Our obedience to magistrates ought to be such, that the obedience which we owe to the King of Kings shall remain entire and unimpaired.²¹³

The implications for a hierarchical society dependent upon a divinely anointed monarch, governed through inherited privilege, and administered through aristocratic privilege and patronage were enormous. Calvin redefined the very nature of kingship in France at the time in a way that was revolutionary. No longer the priest-kings that were anointed and made by the *sacre*, the Calvinist conception of King would make François I a mere minister of God whose authority, privilege and power rested upon the will and election of the people. Thus, this teaching would overturn the fundamental self-understanding of France that had endured for more than one

²¹² Ibid, 988.

²¹³ Ibid, 1001.

thousand years.²¹⁴ Calvinism, viewed five hundred years after its creation, does not seem particularly radical today. However then, during the 16th century, it is logical to assume that this new teaching—based as it was on Christian humanism that sought new directions from the ancient past—was seen by the French Crown and many of the French people as being distinctly destabilizing to society.²¹⁵ Calvin’s political writings, as well as the way in which they were carried out by his followers clearly generated a great deal of controversy.

These examples demonstrate that much of the modern view of government and private life is found in germinal form within the writings of Calvin. This includes respect and conditional obedience to legitimate authority with the understanding that revolt is, at least in some cases, justified. It demonstrates governmental prudence in regards to tax revenue and the understanding that public funds are not the private monetary reserve of the governing authorities; and a relativism as to precisely what form of government need be adopted as all forms are essentially legitimate. Note also that Calvin, himself having a background in the law,

²¹⁴ Ehsan Ahmed notes that “By calling Francis a minister of God (Latin *minister*, French *vray minister*), Calvin infuses the monarch with an identity quite different from that put forth by the sacre in which the king, upon anointment, enters a quasi-priestly class. Whereas a priest partakes in and reinforces the strict hierarchy of prelates of the Catholic Church, a minister’s identity rests on a community of believers in which no hierarchy of interpreters theoretically exists. The notion of minister evokes for Calvin someone both called by the Lord to the ministration of the Word and elected by the vote of the people (4.3.10-15). His consecration consists of a laying on of hands (4.3.16), and his ‘permanent’ duties include the government of the church and caring for the poor (4.3.8). The powers of healing and interpretation are deemed ‘temporary’ and any discussion of them to no avail (4.3.8). Excluded, too, is any belief in hereditary succession and princely or pontifical selection of ministers. Calvin dismisses by overlooking them any thaumaturgic powers and elsewhere condemns the holy unction of clergy as ‘a counterfeit sacrament’ (4.19.7). R. C. Hancock underscores the difference for the reformer between priests and ministers...the first interprets Christ, while the second serve as preachers of the Word...In other words, priests usurp Christ’s identity...while ministers efface themselves behind the Son of God. Although Calvin allows that the ruling magistracy is ‘the most sacred’ calling (4.20.4), he portrays in the dedication a king radically different from the christological one put forth by the French Sacre.

Ehsan Ahmed, “John Calvin’s Portrayal of Francis I as a Minister,” in *Neophilologus: An International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature* 88, no. 4 (2004): 493-498, 494.

²¹⁵ See John T. MacNeil, “John Calvin on Civil Government” in *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985) 42, no. 2 (June 1964):71-91, 85-86.

recommends and sees an inherent usefulness in lawsuits even for Christians.²¹⁶ Giving commoners the tool of the law as leverage over against their societal superiors, or even the government, is also a potent example that seeds of modernism are apparent within these writings. Calvin himself may not have realized just how revolutionary his ideas were, but the implications for deep societal change were recognized by those who would come to follow his teachings.

The more individualistic ideas of Calvinism became apparent in the artwork produced by the Huguenots during the 16th century. Notable is the ceramic art works of Bernard Palissy (1509-1590), which show a striking modernity and break with the past; Jacques La Moyne (1533-1588) became the first European to draw illustrations of the New World; Philibert de l'Orme (1514-1570), Jean Bullant (1515-1578), and Pierre Lescot were instrumental in popularizing the neo-classical style of architecture; Jean Goujon created unique and, again, deeply neo-classical sculptures, including the *Fontaine des Innocents* in Paris. In terms of music, Claude Goudimel and Louis Bourgeois, both Huguenots, created a new style of hymnody, breaking with the models of the Catholic past, that remained standards of French and other Reformed Churches throughout the world, even to this day.

They were recognized as well by the reactionary forces that confronted the Calvinist movement in France, the French Crown and Church, who would move to stifle the challenge to their traditional authority by any means necessary. The Crown, Parlement of Paris, the Church, and the Sorbonne, had largely formed a side that rejected the fundamentals of change, reform, and the essence of northern Renaissance Humanism. The Crown, especially, beginning with François I, adopted much of the external symbolism of the Renaissance and of Humanism, but at a fundamental level, rejected its substance. The agenda actually pursued by François I was reactionary and traditional—in short, the agenda he pursued rejected the essence of change.

²¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* (English Version), 981.

Protestantism, on the other hand, was a new movement. Yes, there were individuals like Wycliffe and Hus, who had advocated for reform of the church earlier than Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—but they were not part of a larger movement; garnered few followers, even fewer noble or royal supporters; and died without changing society. The Protestant reformation, especially in its Calvinist guise, had within it the seeds of a genuinely radical and possibly destructive force. It eliminated the distinction between priest and people; eliminated also the understanding of saints—declaring all sinners saved by grace or by election; if all were sinners, then all stood equally before the face of God. In this system, there is no room for any inherent hierarchical structure of church or state. The proof of these statements lies in incidents like the Peasants' Revolt (1524-1525) in which the lower orders of society rose up against the traditional church and nobility of the Holy Roman Empire.

Following the death of Luther in 1546, however, the leadership of the reformation passed to the much more humanist, and radical, John Calvin. Energetic and focused, Calvin took the concepts that Luther had publicized and refined, organized, and systematized them, launching a Reformation in Switzerland, the Low Countries, Scotland, Hungary, and in the Kingdom of France. Whereas the Lutheran reformation was relatively peaceful, with some notable exceptions, and tended to leave societal structures intact, the effect of the Calvinist reformation would be far different. Energetic and decisive, the Calvinists would launch a societal revolution that would spark decades of civil war in France, the Netherlands, and, by the 1640s, England. Religion, in this case in the guise of the Reformed Church, would drive this societal revolution.²¹⁷ Much more was at stake than simply religious dogma or the particular way in which states could organize territorial churches. The fundamental psychological and sociological

²¹⁷ See Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715* (New York: Norton, 1979), 1-12.

make-up of Europe was also in the balance—two vastly different systems, in effect, in combat. The principles of a divinely established social order, or better hierarchy, that moved from the King (God’s anointed), to the Church, nobility, and city structures, to the laborers, artisans, peasants, and serfs, all within a tightly knit communal societal structure—these represented the inheritance of the past and the *raison d’être* of the early 16th century French Monarchy, Church, and society. The fundamental equivalency of laity and clergy, church governance by clergy and laity together, which implied a certain amount of societal *égalité*, principles of representative government, and individualism was on the other, Reformed, side of the European conflict. The Reformed Church was therefore not only a religious but also a political challenge to the established order.²¹⁸

The Renaissance itself gave much substance to Calvinism. This is especially so in regards to the northern humanist tradition. It combined classicism with a pure piety. The humanists used their drive towards the classical past as justification to find or rediscover the pure expression of the Christianity of the Roman Empire quite apart from the tradition that had grown in Europe between the fall of Rome in the west and the rise of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century. An *ad fontes*, classicizing humanism was combined with the ‘original’ religion of the Greek New Testament and early church fathers to form a characteristically Renaissance construct: something that was entirely new for the time but utterly dependent upon the past for its identity and future trajectory. Nevertheless, the Reformed religion was a product of its *milieu*, the 16th century European world. Richard Dunn notes that “Calvinists and Catholics alike can be labeled ‘conservative’ in the sense that they clung to the traditional medieval belief that no diversity could be tolerated within Christendom. There was just one interpretation of God’s commands,

²¹⁸ See, Dunn, 12.

just one road to salvation...”²¹⁹ Herein lies the explanation to the violence of the 16th century religious wars, pre-eminently the Civil Wars in France between 1562-98: the attempt of each side, Calvinist and Catholic alike, to impose ideological, psychological, and sociological uniformity onto the European, and French, societies.

While the Protestant reformation sprang from many of the same sources as the Renaissance itself, the Genevan Reformation, parent of the French Huguenot movement, was not ideologically compatible with the ‘Middle Way.’ Writers like de Navarre and Rabelais had expressed, through their writings, much sympathy with the call, even the necessity, to reform the French Roman Catholic Church. None of the representatives of the Middle Way had, however, called for the complete overthrow of society through active engagement, violence, and warfare. Lacking in the Huguenot approach was the commitment to change through a passive withdrawal of support of an unjust and tyrannical regime—which, the French Crown appeared to be in the eyes of the Huguenots—that is so apparent in Boetie’s and Montaigne’s works.

Religion, for both the Catholic/Royalist side as well as for the Huguenots became an offensive weapon, as well as a paradigm to impose upon unwilling fellows. It appears that a real peace between the two extremes of Geneva and Rome was impossible without a concomitant imposition of an armistice from a secular authority or space. Arguably, this did not exist early on in the period of the *guerres*, emerging only later in the form of the *politiques*. The crystallization of the Middle Way, that created a secular space within France in which both confessions could co-exist, came only later, most notably in the framework of the *Édit de Nantes*.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 12.

By 1598, when Henri IV issued the *Édit de Nantes*, it stated something remarkable regarding the Huguenots, specifically, it guaranteed to them “...*la liberté de leurs consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes...*”²²⁰ Simultaneously, the *édit* restored Catholicism wherever its practice had been suppressed.²²¹ This was not at all the approach taken to the warring parties in the wars of religion for the nearly forty years of constant strife and violence that had passed. It was also not the approach that either the more radical Catholic League, nor the committed Huguenots, would have tolerated early in the war. The attempts of the French monarchy to impose similar kinds of edicts of pacification had failed. But this rather pacific settlement, based in reason and on a more secular understanding of life and the world came from the humanists who made up the third way between the Huguenot radicals on the one hand, and the Royalist Catholic reactionaries on the other.

Etienne de la Boetie has asked the central question around which this essay is organized: why do people cooperate with tyrants? He writes,

Pour le moment, je voudrais seulement comprendre comment il se peut que tant d’hommes, tant de bourgs, tant de villes, tant de nations supportent quelquefois un tyran seul qui n’a de puissance que celle qu’ils lui donnent, qui n’a pouvoir de leur nuire qu’autant qu’ils veulent bien l’endurer, et qui ne pourrait leur faire aucun mal s’ils n’aimaient mieux tout souffrir de lui que de le contredire. Chose vraiment étonnante—et pourtant si commune qu’il faut plutôt en gémir que s’en ébahir-, de voir un million d’hommes misérablement asservis, la tête sous le joug, non qu’ils y soient contraints par une force majeure, mais parce qu’ils sont fascinés et pour ainsi dire ensorcelés par le seul nom d’un, qu’ils ne devraient pas redouter—puisqu’il est seul—ni aimer—puisqu’il est envers eux tous inhumain et cruel. Telle est pourtant la faiblesse des hommes: contraints à l’obéissance, obligés de temporiser...Si donc une nation, contrainte par la force des armes, est soumise au pouvoir d’un seul—comme la cite d’Athènes le fut à la domination des trente tyrans--, il ne faut pas s’étonner qu’elle serve, mais bien le déplorer. Ou plutôt, ne

²²⁰ *Édit de Nantes* (1598), 2.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 4.

s'en étonner ni ne s'en plaindre, mais supporter le Malheur avec patience, et se réserver pour un avenir meilleur.²²²

(Translation: “For the moment, I would only like to understand how it can be that so many men, so many towns, so many cities, so many nations endure sometimes one single tyrant who has no power except that which they give him, who has no power to harm them but that which they are willing to endure, and who would not be able to do them any harm if they wouldn’t rather suffer it all rather than contradict him. This is truly a stunning thing—and nevertheless so common that it makes more sense to moan than to be amazed--to see a million men, reduced to abject servitude, their heads in the yoke, not that they are constrained by a greater force, but because they are fascinated, or to say more clearly, bewitched by the single name of one man, that they ought not to fear—because he is just one man—nor love—since he is cruel and inhuman to all. Such is, however, the weakness of men: constrained to obedience, forced to stall...If therefore a nation, constrained by force of arms, is submitted to the power of a single man—as the city of Athens was during the time of the domination of the thirty tyrants--we must not be astonished that it serves, but rather we must deplore the fact. Or rather, neither to be stunned nor to bemoan the fact, but endure the unhappiness with patience, and wait for a better future. Author’s translation)

These powerful words set the stage for the grand question that Boetie then raises dealing with the primary theme of the work.

As the work moves into the central argument, Boetie marvels:

Mais, ô Grand Dieu, qu’est donc cela? Comment appellerons-nous ce malheur ? Quel est ce vice, ce vice horrible, de voir un nombre infini d’hommes, non seulement obéir, mais servir, non pas être gouvernés, mais être tyrannisés, d’ayant ni biens, ni

²²² Boetie, 2.

parents, ni enfants, ni leur vie même qui soient à eux ? De les voir souffrir...les paillardises, les cruautés, non d'une armée...mais d'un seul !²²³

(Translation: "What, O Great God, is this? What can we call this unhappiness? What is this vice, this horrible vice, to see an infinite number of men, not only obey but service, not just be governed but to be tyrannized, having neither goods nor family nor children nor their own lives that are really theirs? To see them suffer... the degeneracy, the cruelties, not of an army...but of only one!" Author's translation.)

In many ways, the *Édit de Nantes* was an imperfect embodiment of the best ideas of humanists like Boetie. Despite its shortcomings, it is possible to say that the humanist movement triumphed in France in the end, setting the pattern not only for France, but also for other nations within western Europe as they searched for ways in which various different, and hostile, confessions of faith could co-exist within the structure of civil society. The religious and civic settlement offered by the *Édit de Nantes*, issued by Henri IV in 1598, echoes the Peace of Augsburg (1555) as well as the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Falling roughly in the middle between these two documents, the *Édit* suggests that the western European nations beset by religious intransigence and war, found in the humanist model a recipe for a more lasting peace. This peace, in the French context, based on a more secular understanding of society, religion, and individuals, emerged out of the Middle Way.

Henri IV's great settlement stated, remarkably, that the Huguenots could count upon "...la liberté de leurs consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes..."²²⁴

²²³ Ibid, 3-4.

²²⁴ *Édit de Nantes* (1598), 2.

Simultaneously, the *édit* restored Catholicism wherever its practice had been suppressed.²²⁵ Here, in the Édít of 1598, was the ultimate triumph of Boetie who, as far back as the late 1540s, when he wrote his *Discours sur la Servitude*, called for a reasoned peace and rebellion through a passive withdrawal of support for a tyrannical regime. The settlement of 1598 also suggests that, albeit in subtle ways, the bands were loosening that linked religion and politics, not just in France, but in western Europe in general. The historical condition of France, was thus changing. Calvin, as much as Monluc or the Duc de Guise, equated correct belief with citizenship in a rightly ordered state. There was, in Calvin's synthesis, no room for real disagreement or accepting the fundamental. The essential intransigence and confessional exclusivity to be found on both the Huguenot and the Catholic/Royalist sides appears to explain much of the violence that tore France apart during the long years of the *guerres*.

²²⁵ Ibid, 4.

VII. Conclusions:

This essay has covered a historical period that spans the years 1492, the birth of Marguerite de Navarre, until the Édít de Nantes, promulgated in 1598 by the Huguenot turned Catholic king, Henri IV, ending the *guerres de religion* and providing a framework for peace, tolerance, and rebuilding a torn and ravaged France. For France and much of Europe, these years set the pattern for centuries of national development. Not only did Humanism continue as a major intellectual force within Europe, but the Reformation began; Spain, Portugal, England, and France began to establish overseas empires in the new world; and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation split into camps, Protestant and Catholic, that in time became armed conflict. The world was changing: many challenged old orthodoxies and, throughout Europe, Catholics and Calvinists vied for control of several countries, including France, the Low Countries, and Scotland. By 1598, when Henri IV issued the *Édit de Nantes*, it stated something remarkable regarding the Huguenots, specifically, it guaranteed to them “...*la liberté de leurs consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes...*”²²⁶ Simultaneously, the *édít* restored Catholicism wherever its practice had been suppressed.²²⁷ This was not at all the approach taken to the warring parties in the wars of religion for the nearly forty years of constant strife and violence that had passed. This rather pacific settlement, based in reason and on a more secular understanding of life and the world came from the humanists who made up the third way between the Huguenot radicals on the one hand, and the Royalist Catholic reactionaries on the other.

²²⁶ Édít de Nantes (1598), 2.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

Those who were involved in the *middle way*, were not an isolated group with sharply defined boundaries. Unlike modern political parties, the humanists of France were linked not only by a similar education and philosophy, but they also formed a network that stood, in many ways, at the heart of kingdom. They were the pivot point upon which the other, more radical, sides balanced. A network existed throughout France of likeminded people, men and women, rich and poor, cleric and lay, who, in many cases, knew each other, or of each other; exchanged writings, correspondence, and communication; and provided shelter to representatives of all three of the major warring factions, Catholic and Protestant alike.

The overall condition of France, seen through the lives and journals of the men and women examined in this essay, presents the historian with a confusing array of contradictions that defy easy explanation. The country was largely devastated by the cycles of war and violence, interrupted by brief moments of peace. Two of the three parties involved—Crown and Genevan Reformed—both professed to be fundamentally committed to a religious system that, at its core, has peace and reconciliation between God and humanity and humans with their fellows—a vertical and a horizontal movement. Despite this, both were willing to respond to the other with violence that shocks even today. Michel de Montaigne saw the fundamental reason for this during the later years of the wars themselves. He posited that it was the insistence on imposing one's own particular patterns onto the 'other' and the rest of society that was the engine for the wars and their concomitant violence. At its most basic level, then, while there may well have been economic, social, or class-based elements to the overall problem, the Civil Wars were a product of two opposing visions, Royalist/Catholic and Huguenot, that attempted to impose universal hegemony. This kind of model does not permit diversity or divergence of belief. On the other hand, the absolute confidence of the Huguenots/Calvinists that their vision of

Christianity had divine sanction and favor, guaranteed that they too could not easily agree to a system that permitted—in principle—diversity. Both groups were competing, then, for this ideological control over the country. The power structures of both, and their claims to legitimacy, had their roots in religious faith. For those in power, therefore, the Crown, this challenge was nothing short of a revolution that had the possibility of overturning centuries of accepted power and authority.

For both the Huguenots and the Crown/Catholic forces, religion and politics existed together in a way that may appear difficult to grasp for modern western people. Today, many in the west assume that a wall, quite literally, separates politics and religion, church and state. With this understanding in mind, it might appear that the sixteenth century French context was more bewildering than it genuinely was. For early modern French people, the power and authority of the Catholic Church pre-dated that establishment of the royal authority and it, the Church, gave its benediction to the formation of the French Crown and its power going back to the reign of Clovis (509-511 CE) as the first king of France. Expressed in another way, the power structure of the Crown of France rested upon the faith-based structures of the Roman Catholic Church. To remove one, therefore, was to call into question the other—this is the only possible way of viewing the relationship between Crown and church in early modern France.

The political theory of the Huguenots was less clearly developed during the years of the Civil Wars and tended to vacillate between anti-monarchical sentiment—especially in the wake of the Saint-Barthélemy and pro-monarchialism later as they approached the reign of Henri IV. The central point of this essay has not been, however, the evolution of French Protestant political theory, but rather the revolutionary/radical underpinnings inherent within the structures of Calvinism itself. The argument is that Genevan Protestantism did not accept the hierarchical

authoritarianism of the tradition Catholic Church, and had within it the laicization and democratization of society. This stems from the leveling effect Calvinism had on society, the destruction of the old hierarchy of church and state. After all, for Calvinism, there were no saints, no inherent human structures of power or authority—only the absolute sovereignty of God who expressed himself through the Bible and viewed all people alike. Also, given the fact that local, regional, and national church governance tended to include lay and clergy, Calvinism tended towards a certain kind of democraticization of those who accepted it.

The ideological parties, at least of the early part of the Civil War era, appear to defy easy categorization. Who or what were they? This question finds its answer in a way that is different from that provided by historians like Mack Holt, Mark Greengrass, and Natalie Zemon-Davis. Typically, these historians divide France into two parties, Catholic and Protestant. Once historians have accepted that division, they then attempt to find an explanation for the Wars. Often, economic reasons are cited, for example, the argument of Roche that the Huguenots represented a bourgeoisie—a capitalist class—that was hated by the peasantry and caused the aristocracy and Crown to crush them. This argument tends to rely to varying degrees upon the Marxist understanding that class struggle is at the root of *all* history. This argument does not apply well to the French Wars of Religion. All social classes were present in both sides—as traditionally defined. This understood, the historian must grasp that the fundamental engine for the wars can be found in structures of belief and ideology, in religious faith and commitment. Whether or not this faith commitment was genuine, or not, is immaterial. It was widely accepted that God and the Church undergirded society, for both Crown and Calvinist forces.

The Catholic/Royalist side and the Huguenots have been well discussed in this essay. These parties did indeed exist as most historians have posited. However, they were not alone!

Between the reactionary royalists and the revolutionary Huguenots, a third way existed that was, essentially, humanist. These humanists followed in the tradition of Erasmus. They believed in moderate evangelical reform, the reduction, or elimination of superstition, education in the classics of Roman and Christian antiquity. As suggested by Bard Thompson, they placed an emphasis on the individual and his/her role in society—all of this coupled with skepticism, the drive *ad fontes*, and their willingness to question nearly everything. Above all, the humanists tended to be non-violent in their approach, disliking war. Given the violence of the two great ideological parties fighting over France, the humanists adopted the approach outlined by Etienne de la Boetie, withdrawal of open support of both ideological parties, and calling for reform in a moderate way that did not call for the destruction of the power structures of the day. To avoid persecution by Catholic and Huguenot alike, they tended to cloak their agenda in stories (Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre), in rambling, vague essays (Montaigne), or kept in private journals (de l'Estoile, le Barre, etc).

France, understood in this way, divides into three parties, Catholic, Protestant, and 'Third Way,' or humanist. Unlike the two major parties, the Humanist third way did indeed tend to be elitist and drawn from the educated upper echelons of French society and culture. Unlike the Catholic/Royalist and Huguenot parties, the Humanists did not have an army, organizational structure, or state to advance their agenda.

Through an examination of the political actions of the French Crown the divide between projected public image and the reactionary policy actually carried out is clear throughout the reigns of the Valois monarchs from François I until Henri III—last of the Valois—and the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici. The public image that was sought, was one of tradition and novelty combined into the person of the monarch (or queen mother)—a balance that proved too much for

the Valois Crown. François I began this trend by trying throughout his reign to project the image of enlightened *roi chevalier* and ‘*restaurateur des arts et des lettres*.’ While this trend was less visible during the reign of Henri II, it was certainly a facet of the reign of Catherine de Medici. She tried to maintain an image of Florentine humanist/renaissance sophistication before the public. The Colloquy of Poissy is one good example. Nevertheless, the ancient tradition to maintain the Catholic Church—largely because the Crown felt that it must do so; indebted as it was to the Church for its own power—and to eradicate heresy provided the substance of the agenda pursued by the Crown. Public image thus conflicted badly with actual agenda. Those who followed the Crown—for whatever reason, genuine faith, personal advancement, political power, etc—demonstrated uniformity in opinion and expression in their writings. The Protestants were a danger to both Crown, church, and society; Protestantism was a dangerous ‘novelty;’ the use of various pejoratives (*ceux de la religion, religion pretendue réformée*, etc); as well as a clear conflation of Crown and Church into one entity typify this side. All of this was within a framework of willingness to carry out, justify, and even glorify in acts of brutality against the Protestant minority in the name of Crown and Church.

The journals of the Catholic/Royalist side bear this out clearly. The writings of the Protestants, like Agrippa d’Aubigné, François Hotman, and above all John Calvin demonstrate that they *were* willing—in the name of their religious view—to demolish at least one thousand years of political French culture. This was specifically true in regards to the Crown and the structures that undergirded French society. They took the new attitudes of the Renaissance to their radical extreme and were not willing to put them into practice in an incremental way. It was an ‘all-or-nothing’ approach that brooked no opposition. Hotman, d’Aubigné, and Calvin all—through their writings—demonstrate a clear willingness to discard unsympathetically the

traditional sacral kingship of France and suggest a very definite kind of relativism into the question of how, or why, a government should rule or be organized.

Between these two, the Third Way approached the problems France was facing by cloaking the substance of their calls for reform under a mask that maintained loyalty to the traditional order. Eventually, the failure of either Crown or Protestant parties to arrive at peace—and their seemingly endless cycle of wars, edicts of peace, and renewal of hostilities—prompted this third way to propose a far more secular approach to governance that built the foundations of later styles of government that do indeed separate church and state in a fuller and more overt manner. Jean Bodin's *Six Books of the Republic* is less a call for divine right absolute monarchy than it is a call for a solution that superseded all of the religious parties then active in France at the time.

What, if anything, links all of these different people into an ideological group? The 'Middle Way' was not limited to either men or women, but combined the two. Like the later Enlightenment, which in many ways represents the final flowering of Renaissance humanism, men and women, Marguerite de Navarre, Rabelais, and Michel de Montaigne, contributed to the movement. If there is preponderance of male writers this is due to the societal realities of the time that tended to slant much more towards the patriarchal. The 'Middle Way' was, however, frequently limited in terms of class moreso than it was of gender. Humanism tended to be a movement of those who were elite educated. This limited the number of people who could join in the movement. In some ways, this parallels the spread of Protestantism in France itself.

The Huguenots and those who created the 'Middle Way' tended to be from middle class and elite backgrounds. The French peasantry tended to not become Protestant and certainly not

become humanists. This rule breaks down, however, when the scholar examines the demographics of the Reformation in southern and southwestern France in which large numbers of peasants did become Calvinists. It is undeniable, however, that the representatives of the 'Middle Way' were either middle, or upper middle, class, educated bureaucrats and/or members of the *noblesse de l'épée* or the *noblesse de robe*.

Whatever their ultimate societal constituency the members of the 'Middle Way' had more than a humanist education and privileged background in common. They combined the new learning and attitudes of the Renaissance/Humanist movements with a willingness to co-operate and remain loyal to the established order. They remained tolerant throughout the decades of distress and violence that tore France to pieces and cloaked their critiques behind stories such as *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *The Heptameron*, the *Essays* of Montaigne, or the private journals of Pierre de l'Estoile and Guillaume and Michel Le Riche.

The Royalist/Catholic side and the Calvinists called for opposite things but had similar philosophical underpinnings. The Calvinists sought, like the Catholics of France, to impose one order onto the Kingdom. This imposition was fundamentally revolutionary to a deeply traditional population; more than this, in that it appeared to overturn the traditional underpinnings of power of the French 'sacral' kingship it posed a threat not only to ecclesiastical power structures but also to royal/political power. Given this fact, the Crown, despite its desire to appear modern and favor the humanist movement, was willing to use any/all means necessary to crush a movement that was, from its point of view, not only heretical but seditious. The Calvinists reacted to violence with violence and an apparent unwillingness or inability to see just how revolutionary their cause was. Between these two exists a 'middle' way—the moderate humanists that were carrying on the tradition of the humanism of the high Renaissance. They called for reform in a

cloaked way. They never demanded revolution or the destruction of the traditional structures of power.

The key to understanding the Humanist movement is the shift it made within the mindset of European humanity during the early modern era. Pico Mirandola had argued that humanity, without divine help, could ascend upwards towards the gods, or descend downwards toward a more bestial existence. The Renaissance, as Bard Thompsen suggested also placed a greater emphasis on the importance of the individual and his/her place in the world—this, coupled with the acknowledgement that this life too merits appreciation, worth, and study. The Reformation movement made the leap from philosophical to practical/religious individualism. This is certainly not individualism in the modern sense, but rather the understanding that salvation and one's personal standing with God was not community based but purely individual. Over time, this Humanist/Reformation individualism granted more worth and importance to the standing of the individual in society and before God. This took on political overtones. The Huguenots and Catholics were not, however, modern political crusaders. Nevertheless, they foreshadow them.

What is the origin of the violence of the French Civil Wars? Ultimately, the scholar can only move towards a partial answer. It is not possible to attain an absolutely full or perfect answer as to why the new understanding of the Reformation movements met with such profound violence. Secondly, it is probable that the violence was predicated upon multi-factorial causation, there was not one single cause. The reactionary forces of Crown and Church resisted the new understanding of individualism that did indeed include economic, sexual, familial, ecclesiastical, and societal implications, because it represented a threat to the power and privilege of the established feudal system. In other words, the 'powers-that-be' had far too much to lose by the success of the Reformed movement within France. It was enough to adopt the

external symbolism of the new learning in terms of art, learning, philology, religion, and society, but the demand was clearly to leave the underlying core of State, Crown, Church, and Society untouched. That goal in turn required that the traditional sense of identity derived from the communal medieval context be preserved. Occupants of the middle ground, saw the need for reform but stopped short of calling for anything more than alterations of the external appearance (symbols) of change. The change that the humanist called for was essentially individualistic—a change of the individual and how h/she viewed and approached life. Why? Perhaps this is so because the fear of reprisal from the forces of Crown and Church may have played a significant part: fear of temporal loss from violence suffered from Royalist forces, and even spiritual loss, that is the fear that departure from the traditional Roman Catholic Church would lead to excommunication and the terrible consequences that entailed.

In contrast to both of the other groups, the Huguenot forces called not only for the reform of the substance of the Church, that is to say theology and ecclesiology, but also the essential structure of France as well. In a society in which Church and State were, at the very least two sides of the same coin, to make the church presbyterial, rather than hierarchical, overturned the traditional order of society. An insistence on the priesthood of all believers, including the education of men and women so that they could read the bible, had the same revolutionary effect. The causes of societal breakdown appear inherent in the desacralization of marriage and four of the other seven sacraments; the abolition of pilgrimages, relics, processions, and masses overturned centuries of entrenched custom and, I might add, financial revenue for the Church, generated by the pilgrimages themselves.

Threatened by a movement that removed traditional power and prestige and, through its emphasis on the individual, revolutionize the traditional role of family, sexuality, and education,

the Crown and Church reacted the way entrenched power has throughout history, with violence. The Reformed Church movement, implying as it did a revolution in society, even from a metaphysical or existential point of view, had to be stopped by any means necessary. Church and Crown had too much to lose.

What are we to make of the mob violence, especially on the Catholic side, that served as the backbone of the killings in such events as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day? Just as entrenched regimes have frequently resorted to the rhetoric of dehumanization in an attempt to rid themselves of their perceived foes, through propaganda and the stirring up of the masses to acts of violence, thusly did the Crown and Church of France react to the Reformed/Huguenot movement that had united the symbolism and substance of far-reaching societal reform.²²⁸ King François I, at the surface level a true son of the Renaissance, explicitly insisted to the University of Paris, in a move reminiscent of totalitarian regimes throughout history, that they 'indoctrinate' the youth in the true faith.²²⁹ There was a continued propaganda campaign, dehumanizing the Reformed in the eyes of the Catholic majority, and leading directly to the Massacres characteristic of French Civil Wars. That the Huguenots saw things in this way is clear from their 'martyriologies,' as well as in writings of men like Agrippa d'Aubigné. In his 'Prayer for Vengeance,' he writes, of those who were closing their hearts to pity or human compassion to them:

²²⁸ "From the mid-1520s Protestants were plagued by a wide range of repressive legislation that...was an almost continuous effort to regulate their behavior on every level. The legislation was not always consistent (alternating between prescribing banishment and forbidding emigration, for example, and between controlling the printing press and abolishing it altogether), but its tone is unmistakable. Except for intermittent periods of crisis or compromise, it reflected an almost totalitarian, off-with-their-heads attitude toward heresy and disobedience..."

Donald R. Kelley, "Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew," In *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Document*, ed. Alfred Soman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 188.

²²⁹ Kelly, 190.

“And those who shut their eyes to us in misery,
 and those who turned deaf ears to us and to our prayers,
 Who had no heart to help but added to our pain,
 Who had no hand to give but greedily to take

 May they find your eyes closed to judge their misery,
 May they find your ears deaf to them and to their prayers,
 And find your bosom barred to pity and grace,
 Your hand gone dry and bare of blessings and gifts.”²³⁰

The French Crown and Church sought to exterminate forces that were inimical to their understanding of society and cosmology, in this case the Huguenot/Calvinist movement that did indeed unite the symbols as well as the substance of change. Many of the French intellectuals of the day—Montaigne, Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre, amongst others—expressed their critiques of society, brutality, and intolerance. They also upheld the new learning and an individualist understanding of society, gender, and sexuality, but remained, perhaps for reasons of fear of loss, temporal and spiritual, largely loyal to the existing order. Being a decided minority (no more than about 10% of the total population), the Huguenots took up arms to defend themselves when the persecution became intolerable.

The Reformation movement, once it reached France, sparked deep and violent societal upheavals. The nascent modernism of the reformed side conflicted with the reactionary forces of the Royalist side and Church in France that had adopted the outward symbolism, but not the essence, of the new learning produced by the Renaissance. The reformation did not have this

²³⁰ O.J.A. Roche, *The Days of the Upright: The Story of the Huguenots* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1965), 315.

effect, at least immediately, in Germany or England, two major countries that also dealt with significant religious and societal changes at the same time as France. How does one account for the difference in intensity?

In the case of England, I believe it was because the Reformation movement was able to harness the power and prestige of the Crown and, in fact, enhance it, by making the King *summus episcopus* of the English Church (an act of Henry VIII himself). The traditional ruling order was made a component of the new learning and theology in a way that did not happen in France. There was an unbroken continuum of Bishops, priests, and deacons, as well as the Lords Spiritual still sitting together with the Lords Temporal in the House of Lords. There were Catholic uprisings in England, such as the *Pilgrimage of Grace*, but this, and other similar examples, never reached the size or scope of the Huguenot uprisings in France, neither did they provoke from the English Crown the level of violence that the reformation would in France. Significantly, the Reformation of Scotland did seem to provoke more bloodshed and societal upheaval as the Calvinists battled for control of the kingdom, perhaps a reflection of the more fundamentally radical nature of Calvinist.

The case of the Holy Roman Empire is rather different. The power of the Emperors was elective and limited, the balance of power residing with the local princes of the Empire. Central power was thus more distant from regional control in regards to internal matters than in France. Just as in England, the German Reformation did not threaten the established political power structures to the same extent as the Calvinist Reformation did in France. Luther actively sought, and received, support from the local princes and electors who sheltered him and, under whose protection, the new Reformation movement continued to grow. Significantly, when a proletarian revolt did break out (the Peasant's Revolt—1525), Luther sided overtly with 'royalist' authority

and called upon the princes of the Empire, including those that had adopted his theological positions, to crush the peasants relentlessly.

Thus in England and Germany royal authority absorbed the reformation, left current political and aristocratic structures in place, and made the rulers *de facto* lords of the Church as well. These factors may have prevented the Reformation in both countries from becoming civil wars between Crown and reformed subjects. Arguably, one could say the same thing about the Reformation in Geneva as well, the centre of the Calvinist reforms. Calvin and his reform-minded colleagues assumed much of the political as well as the ecclesiastical authority in Geneva. Church and 'Crown' were thus united into Calvinist hands. The balance of power switched from Catholic authority/protestant minority to Protestant authority/Catholic minority.

The French Reformation was a conflict between the reactionary Royalist side aligned with the Roman Catholic Church that had adopted many of the outward symbols of the Renaissance movement, but rejected the essence of that new learning and the Huguenots. They, the Huguenots, accepted and united the external symbolism of reform as well as the essence of that reform including freedom of conscience, a collegial approach to secular and ecclesiastical governance, elective kingship, and far reaching societal reforms such as the education of women, the priesthood of all believers, and the essential equality of clergy and laity. Francois Hotman serves as an example of the deeply radical nature of this new movement in France.²³¹

²³¹ When the French Kings were perceived as permitting the growth of heresy, or not supporting the Roman Catholic Church with enough force, an extreme Roman Catholic Side emerged (the Catholic League) that would use many of the same arguments as the Huguenots in regard to political power and elective kingship, as a proposed justification to remove the monarch and place a more suitable candidate on the throne. To a certain extent, the Catholic League became almost as much of a threat to Royal authority as the Huguenots did. This phenomenon demonstrates that the French monarchy, which as has been stated above, was largely dependent upon strong men to keep it functioning properly, had largely lost control during the reigns of the weak Charles IX, Henri III, and of course Queen Mother Catherine de Medici. The most important point, however, is that the League, which had, according to many historians, lost a great deal of vigor by about 1576, was reinvigorated and largely re-established by the appearance

Men and women like Montaigne, Rabelais, and Marguerite de Navarre--accepted the need for change and reform, as well as religious toleration. They adopted its essence, but refused to call for a systematic societal change/revolution. Thus society's 'symbols' remained intact. The extreme violence perpetrated by the authorities against the Reformed in France represents the same kind of repressive measures typical of any regime, threatened in its very essence by a new philosophy—extermination by any means necessary. The mobs of commoners who participated so readily in the endemic violence, such as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, were stirred by Royal and ecclesiastical forces through propagandistic speeches, sermons, and publications in ways similar to that which were employed by more modern totalitarian regimes against minorities, subversives, or undesirables. The result was the same—a shocking barbarity and violence.

Decades before the conclusion of the sixteenth century Wars of Religion in France, Etienne de la Boetie had written,

Mais, ô Grand Dieu, qu'est donc cela? Comment appellerons-nous ce malheur ? Quel est ce vice, ce vice horrible, de voir un nombre infini d'hommes, non seulement obéir, mais servir, non pas être gouvernés, mais être tyrannisés, d'ayant ni biens, ni parents, ni enfants, ni leur vie même qui soient à eux ? De les voir souffrir les rabines, les paillardises, les cruautés, non d'une armée...mais d'un seul ! ²³²

Identifying cooperation with tyranny as the source of humanity's continued struggle with tyranny, Boetie advocated a type of resistance that was passive : withdraw support and refuse to cooperate. Nothing more, he argued was needed for tyranny to fall. This essay has suggested that

of Henri IV, a Huguenot, as heir apparent. The paradigm I have suggested holds true in this case as well. To the reactionary League, Henri IV represented the potential triumph of the Huguenot side and, in their minds, the implementation of the essential, not just symbolic, reforms suggested by the Genevan Reformation.

²³² Boetie, 3.

there were three ideological groups in France by the outbreak of the Civil Wars in 1562. One was the reactionary side, made up of entrenched forces of the Crown/League that had adopted much of the outward symbols of the Renaissance/Humanist movement but at root remained essentially regressive. Another was the Moderate Side, made up mostly, but not exclusively, of Catholic Humanists and Renaissance scholars who adopted much of the essence of reform, but stopped short of calling for systematic societal change through revolution. Lastly, there was the Huguenot Side who collated renaissance and humanist understandings into a systematized body of thought, and then proceeded to the next logical step of calling for systematic reform that went deeper than an adoption of the external, 'modern' forms, societal revolution.

The 'middle way', described above, preceded the *politique* side that would arise later and become prominent especially during the reign of Henri III, calling essentially for powerful centralized authority. It is probable that the *politique* movement evolved out of this 'middle way', but was not identical to it. The middle way that I am proposing advocated moderate reform in the state as well as the church. It retained much of the outward structures/symbols of the old order but the substance of the new changes of the Renaissance. They did not necessarily urge the construction of a powerful, even absolute, royal authority.

This essay has suggested that the violence that typified that second half of the 16th century in France resulted, at least in part, from the reactionary forces of the Crown attempting to maintain their power and the traditional structures upon which their power rested, by any means necessary—legal measures, military force of arms, religious persecution, propaganda, and murder. The Moderate Side remained loyal to the old order but raised cautious voices against violence, intolerance, and bloodshed. The Genevan/Reformed Side responded initially by passive acceptance and conformity, then with armed conflict.

This essay has taken a prosopological approach towards an intellectual history of the period, the history of the ideas that made up the various parties in the French Wars of Religion and how they evolved over time. This study utilized a close textual analysis of the materials combined with a comparative approach that examines how closely the lives of the individuals mirrored their writings. Also germane to this subject is the dimension of power. Some people, like Catherine de Medici, had tremendous power and therefore remain prominent to this day; others, like Pierre de l'Étoile had little or no power. Yet their lives and historical record survived. A comparative study of the both groups has proven useful in establishing how the wars were perceived by a variety of levels within society.

The French Crown was pursuing that which was considered to be cutting-edge and novel *at the time*. They promulgated an image *par excellence* of the enlightened Renaissance monarchy that François I and his Valois successors wished to project. The substance of their agenda--expressed legally, socially, and militarily--was regressive and representative of a more authoritarian power structure that was not, in fact, in harmony with the Renaissance ideals that the Crown projected. They were willing to defend the traditional power structure at all costs. This, I am suggesting, is the ultimate origin of the violence of the Civil Wars.

Tzvetan Todorov, in his work *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism*, argues that humanism created a, "...slow revolution, since it took several centuries—which led to the establishment of the modern world. To grasp it in its most general sense, we can describe it as the passage from a world whose structure and laws were preexisting and immutable givens for every member of society, to a world that could discover its own nature and define its norms

itself.²³³ The humanist revolution that he describes was certainly part of the broader picture of civil war, sectarian violence, and repression that characterized much of French history during the 16th century. The revolution that the humanists launched was not a call to take up arms and violently overthrow the existing order. Theirs was, rather, an intellectual revolution that, as Todorov suggests, caused a “...disenchantment of the world and a sacralization of man; values, removed from one, [are] entrusted to the other.”²³⁴ Amidst the devastation of the French civil wars, it might be difficult to argue that humanism, in any sense, triumphed, or perhaps even survived. In the end, however, the settlement reached by Henri IV, himself in many ways a man of *realpolitik*, and his willingness to permit a limited kind of diversity within the kingdom represents the triumph, however short lived or imperfect, of the middle way. The humanist revolution Todorov describes fits well with what this essay has described as Étienne de la Boetie’s own battle cry, ““*Or ce tyran seul, il n’est pas besoin de le combattre, ni de l’abattre. Il est défait de lui-même, pourvu que le pays ne consente point à sa servitude. Il ne s’agit pas de lui ôter quelque chose, mais de ne rien lui donner.*”²³⁵

Inherent in Boetie’s writing is the concept of disobedience engendered by tyranny, not engendered by religious considerations but, instead, by humane. The humanists changed France during the 16th century and beyond. Todorov provides readers with thought provoking declaration, « The new [humanist] principle, whose consequences may till affect us, is responsible for the present face of our politics and our law, our arts and our sciences.”²³⁶ Time itself provided the ultimate victory for the French humanists of the 16th century.

²³³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton, 2002), 9.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²³⁵ Boetie, 4.

²³⁶ Todorov, 10

This essay has attempted to move towards answers to various important questions about the era. For example, through a prosopological examination of the lives of various French men and women of the time, one can move toward a greater understanding of what the historical condition of France was during the sixteenth century. Their lives, and even more importantly, their thoughts, recording for posterity in journals, letters, and other written texts, give us a rare glimpse into the minds of those who acted in this great drama. This essay will also help to shed light on the issue of the union of religion and politics in France during the sixteenth century. To what extent were they united for both the Royalist Catholics and the Genevan Reformed? Crucial for the purposes of this work, is the examination of how extensively the various ideologies of the three parties suggested here find reflection in the journals and personal writings of these important actors?

The union of religion and politics by the Huguenots and the Royalist/Catholic party produced a conflict that tore France apart for more than forty years. The destruction was so great that national collapse was within the realm of possibility. This collapse represented a cherished hope of Spanish King Philip II whose international war against Protestantism was one of his driving goals. The Humanist, *middle way*, sought to mediate between these two and, when that failed, to withdraw their support from both, calling for reform and change in cloaked or hidden ways. In the mouths of grotesque Rabelaisian characters or through the eloquent musings of Montaigne, the humanists observed, wrote, and called for reform, waiting for the day when the conflict would end. An exhausted France reached this end with the assumption to the throne of Henri IV, first of the Bourbons. Together with the ideological children of the humanist tradition, the *politiques*, forged a new France. A modified *middle way*, characterized by a certain kind of tolerance for the Huguenots, the restoration of Catholic ritual where it had been abolished, and a growing centralization of royal

power characterized France until the reign of Louis XIV and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

What was the condition of France by the beginning of the reign of Henri IV in 1589? France was still a badly divided country that had come perilously close to disintegration; a kingdom in which Catholics and Protestants had killed each other, destroyed the other's property, and uttered unimaginable curses directed at the other party. In the midst of this, the humanists had attempted to argue for moderate reform, such as we see in the writings of Marguerite de Navarre, Etienne de la Boetie, and François Rabelais, in the beginning, especially during the reign of François I and continuing during the reign of Henri II. As the violence increased to the point of war by 1562, the humanists, like Montaigne, began to withdraw and wait for the end of the horrors around them. After the massacre of the St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24, 1572), the humanists, Montaigne and Bodin amongst them, began to work towards a political, non-religious, settlement to the conflict of the day. They would be known throughout history as the *politiques*. When, in 1598, Henri IV issued the Édit de Nantes, he attempted something his predecessor, Charles IX had tried in 1570, i.e. to command a national forgetting of the trials and traumas of the wars. The *édit* states,

Premièrement, que la mémoire de toutes choses passées d'une part et d'autre, depuis le commencement du mois de mars 1585 jusqu'à notre avènement à la couronne et Durant les autres troubles précédents et à leur occasion, demeurera éteinte et assoupie, comme de chose non advenue. Et ne sera loisible ni permis à nos procureurs généraux, ni autres personnes quelconques, publiques ni privées, en quelque temps, ni pour quelque occasion que ce soit, en faire mention, procès our poursuite en aucunes cours ou juridictions que ce soit.²³⁷

²³⁷ Édit de Nantes (1598), 3-4.

(Translation: Firstly, that the memory of all the things that have passed either of one party or the other since the beginning of the month of March 1585 until our attainment to the throne and during the other preceding troubles as well as their cause, will remain extinct and soothed, as if it had never come to pass. And it will not be legal nor permitted to our procurators general, nor to any other person whatsoever, public or private, at any time, nor for any reason that might arise, to make mention, legal case, or pursuit in any way or jurisdiction that exists. Authors Translation)

The Édít restored the practice of Catholicism throughout the country, but made provision for the Huguenots.

Et pour ne laisser aucune occasion de troubles et différends entre nos sujets, avons permis et permettons à ceux de ladite religion prétendue réformée vivre et demeurer par toutes les villes et lieux de cestui notre royaume et pays de notre obeissance, sans être enquis, vexés, molestés ni astreints à faire chose pour le fait de la religion contre leur conscience, ni pour raison d'icelle être recherchés dans les maisons et lieu où ils voudront habiter en se comportant au reste selon qu'il est contenu en notre present Édít.²³⁸

(Translation : And to not leave any occasion for troubles and differences between our subjects, we have permitted and allowed, to those of the reformed religion, to live and dwell in all of the towns and places of this our kingdom and lands obedient to us, without being subjected to enquiries, vexed, molested, nor restrained from carrying out their religion that would go against their conscience, nor for any reason to be searched in their homes or where they would like to live, dwelling, in regard to the rest of the country, as it is set forth in our present Edict. Author's translation).

²³⁸ Édít de Nantes (1598), 5

In a few words, while imperfect, perhaps, from the point of view of many, Henri IV's *Édit* establish several guiding humanist principles that men and women like de la Boetie, Marguerite de Navarre, Jean Bodin, and Michel de Montaigne, had argued for, written about, and sought through their own passive resistance. Arguably, the *Édit* established a certain kind of tolerance, commanded national reconciliation in the form of forgetting the past, and allowed for a secular public sphere open to both Catholic and Protestant. The *Édit* may well embody many key humanist, and *politique*, desires, allowing the country to move towards a divorce of religion and politics that would be many more years in the making. When the *Édit* states that one of the primary goals is to safe guard, for the Protestants, "...la liberté de leurs consciences, et la sûreté de leurs personnes et fortunes..."²³⁹ (Translation: ...the liberty of their consciences, and the security of their persons and fortunes...), we hear the voice of humanism, the *Middle Way*, and certainly of Etienne de la Boetie.

²³⁹ *Édit de Nantes (1598)*, 2.

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