The Scepter and the Cilice: the Politics of Repentance in Sixteenth-Century France (1572-1610)

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ABSTRACT

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The reign of Henri III saw a multiplication of penitential acts: theological texts on repentance were published, new penitential orders founded, and processions organized that included acts of mortification—many of which were led by the king himself, who could be seen marching through the streets of Paris dressed in a penitential sackcloth. Why did the concept of repentance acquire such an unprecedented political import during the second half of the sixteenth century? Based on the examination of a wide range of textual sources including treatises, pamphlets, journals, public sermons, prayers, satirical poems, as well as major works by Jacques-Auguste de Thou, Pierre de L’Estoile, and Pierre Victor Palma Cayet, my dissertation seeks to bring answers to this understudied question, which must be understood in light of a variety of theological-political factors and complex historical circumstances. Not simply a theological concept governing personal gestures of contrition and regret towards God, repentance began to function as a political concept during the Wars of Religion. It served both as an instrument in the affirmation of monarchical power and as a means to delegitimize it. With Henri III’s penitential processions, repentance broke away from the confines of the private sphere to take to the streets. Soon it became ubiquitous, part of a common theological-political vocabulary: in the years 1588-1589, the ultra-Catholic League as well as other political forces opposing the king appropriated processions and penitential spaces, turning them into sites of resistance and contestation. As a result, even if penance had become an
almost idiosyncratic feature of Henri III’s style of government, little of its currency was lost after his assassination. With Henri IV’s conversion to Catholicism in 1593, repentance acquired a new political face. Placed in the difficult position of having to restore order in France, Henri IV and his supporters adopted several political strategies to counter the efforts of contentious factions within the realm. The rhetoric of penance and forgiveness became one of the tools that allowed the king to reestablish and stabilize his political authority and legitimacy. During the Surrender of Paris in 1594, Henri IV took on the role of the merciful monarch dispensing forgiveness. This strengthened his sovereignty and he became, as the historical reception of his image attests, the king who saved France from the Wars of Religion. Reconciliation, however, came at a price. When Henri IV issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, an act that instituted a bi-confessional state in France, repentance no longer stood at the core of political reconciliation and stability, but rather at its limits. Instead of acknowledging the past atrocities in the form of an “institutionalized” or public form of repentance, the king wielded the rhetoric of forgiveness in order to efface penance. References to the past violence or to religious topics susceptible of fueling civil discord were censored. Because the dramatic and ostensible processions of penance made popular by Henri III had been more likely to incite people to violence rather than to pacify them, Henri IV and Royalists discredited their political import in the public sphere. Repentance was being censured, and perhaps for this reason more present than ever. By supporting the suppression of public representations of penance, with the goal of restoring “civil accord,” Henri IV decidedly reshaped collective identity and memory for both Catholics and Protestants.
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Figure 1: The Penitent

Albrecht Dürer, *Der Büssende* (1510)
**Introduction**

A curtain is drawn, making the candle-lit chapel appear small and intimate. Pure architectural lines and an unadorned altar suggest unostentatious simplicity. The chapel is empty save for a solitary figure kneeling before the altar. His eyes are cast down in deep contemplation, his head bowed in humility. The man is wearing a cloth around his hips. His chest, back, legs, and feet are naked. In his hand is a three-thonged leather scourge with which he strikes his back, in pangs of deep sorrow and contrition. Humbly, he lowers himself before God to ask for forgiveness, striving to cleanse his soul of the sins he has committed. There are no witnesses to his penance. The chapel is closed. His confession is private. God alone will hear his cry for mercy.

Albrecht Dürer’s well-known 1510 woodcut—*Der Büssende (The Penitent)*—represents a scene that is not entirely typical of early sixteenth-century penitential practices. Laymen and women, for one thing, did not usually flagellate themselves. Such acts of mortification were in fact rarely performed, and when they were, it was more likely to be by ascetic monks, or by small groups of flagellants, mostly in southern Europe. Also, penance was more generally understood as a ritual which had a public dimension, involving the presence and mediation of others. In the Roman Catholic church, the Sacrament of penance required a remorseful sinner to confess, ask for forgiveness, undergo absolution, and perform reparation through works of satisfaction. In accomplishing these parts of the ritual, the sinner would find his or her way to God with
the guidance of a priest. After the Fourth Council of the Lateran of 1215, confession had become a central element of the Sacrament of penance. The famous Canon 21 (*Omnis utriusque sexus*) decreed that every Christian who had reached the years of reason (*annos discretionis*) had to confess their sins to a priest at least once a year. Although the sorrow and contrition of the sinner was personal, confession, as many scholars have observed, was not a private act in the modern sense of the term: it was most often performed in an “open or public place in the sight of all.”\(^1\) For most lay penitents, “confession meant a face-to-face encounter with a priest sitting in a chair, either in the open church, in a side chapel, or perhaps behind the high altar.”\(^2\) The practice of using a confessional box separated by a partition, allowing the sinner to confess without being under the gaze of the priest and of the rest of the congregation, emerged only at the very end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. Thus, even if confession was theoretically a private declaration of sins, it had a public component: the sinner’s penance was visible to others. Once the priest had absolved the penitent, the last step in the cycle of forgiveness—reparation—could then be initiated: the sinner would pay off his or her debt or penalty (*poena*) to God with works of satisfaction, otherwise known as good works or the works of mercy. Here as well, the process was at least in part public. Although prayers, fasting, and certain voluntary forms of self-denial were often observed

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in private settings, works of charity (alms giving, feeding the poor, burying the dead, etc.) involved the presence of others, so did of course penitential processions.

But perhaps the emphasis that Dürer placed on interiority and solitude in this scene of penance was meant to reflect a deeper part of the process, one that had to do with individual self-reformation and self-fashioning. Such would have been the way that many people understood repentance in the first part of the sixteenth century. It was first and foremost constructed as a personal act performed by the sinner for God. The mediation of the Roman Catholic Church—which, as we know, Protestants would go on to challenge in many ways—was meant to facilitate the expression of repentance by giving it a ritualistic form.3 If some put emphasis on the ceremony, trusting it to erase sin, others saw it as a way of promoting the process of interior transformation. Originating in the deep recesses of the sinner’s soul, penance was understood as a personal gesture of contrition and regret towards God, a voluntary act of humble atonement for sins committed. Reflecting this emphasis is the Greek concept of μετάνοια (metanoia), which means a “transformative change of heart or mind” and which was present in the discourse of Christian theologians at the time. It implies that the penitent has to undergo a complete spiritual transformation and is deeply connected to the concept of conversion (conversio

in Latin), a word which, when parsed etymologically, suggests “a reversal, a change of direction.” More precisely, according to Pierre Hadot, *metanoia* makes up one of the two definitions associated with the concept of *conversio*: conversion “corresponds to two Greek words with different meanings, on the one hand *epistrophe*, which signifies change of orientation and implies the idea of a return (return to the origin, return to the self), on the other hand *metanoia*, which signifies change of mind, repentance, and implies the idea of a mutation and a rebirth.” If Christian conversion is “*epistrophe* and *metanoia*, return and rebirth,” then repentance, which sixteenth-century theologians often called *metanoia*, is to be understood as a reinvention of the self that is like a new conversion, or a conversion renewed with every practice of the rite of penance. At any rate, *metanoia* was meant to be a profound, radical, and complete reorientation of the whole individual, an interior experience of rebirth and spiritual awakening.

If Dürer’s woodcut seems at first to be primarily focused on penance as a private religious act between the sinner and God, its other title, *King David doing Penance (König David tut Busse)*, forces us to refine our interpretation. A king’s repentance necessarily had a political dimension, even—or perhaps, especially—when it appeared to involve the individual outside of his function: no matter how private it seemed, it would always be in some sense public. And yet, the ambiguity of this image must not be lost. No *regalia* or marks of royalty distinguish him from other penitents: crowns, scepters,

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.
swords, and royal robes are absent. Dürer’s representation draws a clear separation between the body natural and the body politic. The flesh that is punished is David’s own, and for those ignorant of the second title commonly given to this engraving, his repentance could very well appear to be that of a private individual. In this scene, remorse and guilt are clearly reflected through a pure moment of solitude and interiority.

This is not how a king’s penance would go on to be represented in the second half of the sixteenth century. With the Wars of Religion (1562-1598), as the present work will show, penance would become overtly, even blatantly, political. Again, this is of course not to suggest that repentance, when it concerned the king, could ever be devoid of political meaning. The *Miroirs des princes*, for instance, written earlier in the century (Machiavelli’s *The Prince* being an exception) have often examined the ways in which penance entered into the education of a sovereign. In his reflections on Saint Paul in *Enchiridion militis christiani*, Erasmus advised the prince to turn inwards in order to battle vice and sin by every means possible. Before trying to convert others, Christ’s disciples “first preach[ed] penance,” he stated, because a prince must use gentleness and prudence to lead men out of error and towards the path of God and salvation. Although this political understanding of penance represents an important aspect in the development and evolution of the concept, this study will focus on instances where repentance became even more overtly political, part of a complex and widespread strategy of governance.

During the Wars of Religion, Protestants and Catholics began to show a very different kind of concern for the moral state of the king and the nation, and repentance as

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a concept and a body of practices started to play a central role in politics in a way that had rarely been seen before. One can see signs of such a shift, for example, in the discourses surrounding the death of Charles IX, whose reign had been marked by the notorious St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572. In the aftermath of the traumatic event, Protestants not only accused the king of betrayal, claiming that he had used the pretext of the marriage between Henri de Navarre, the future Henri IV, and Marguerite de France to entrap them, but asked if he had in fact felt any guilt or regret about the tragedy, thereby placing repentance at the center of a deep questioning about the monarch’s legitimacy.\(^8\)

Because of the long-standing tradition of judging one’s life by one’s death, some of the parties opposed to his rule, and particularly Protestants, interpreted his death from tuberculosis as a consequence of divine punishment.\(^9\) In an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Propos notables dudit Roy, estant au lict de la mort, et de sa nourrice*, clearly written by a Protestant, it was suggested that Charles IX had expressed his guilt to his alleged Huguenot wet nurse for the role he played in the massacre:

Ah ma nourrice, m’amie, ma nourrice, que de sang et de meurtres? Ah que j’ai eu un meschant Conseil? O mon Dieu pardonne les moy et me fay misericorde, s’il te plaist, je ne scay où je suis tant ils me rendent perplexe et agité. Que deviendra tout ceci ? Que feray-je ? Je suis perdu, je le sens bien.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) In 1574, Théodore de Bèze wrote in his correspondence about Charles IX’s death: “Il faut s’émerveiller du jugement de Dieu : le tyran est mort en rejetant du sang par tous les orifices de son corps.” (*Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze* (1574), collected by Hippolyte Aubert, ed. by Alain Dufour & Béatrice Nicoller, pub. by the Société du Musée historique de la Réformation, (Genève: Droz; [Paris]: [diff. Champion]), T. XV, 1991, 112.

By depicting the prince as penitent and remorseful, the author of the pamphlet clearly meant to reorient the perception of the massacre—if the king had repented for this crime and asked for forgiveness on his deathbed, shouldn’t then all Catholics involved in it follow suit? Catholic propaganda, on the other hand, countered with radically different accounts of the king’s last moments. Responding directly to some Protestants’ suggestion that Charles IX had struggled with the monstrosity of the crimes he had allegedly committed, the prince’s confessor, Arnaud Sorbin, published several funeral orations publicly praising his serene and peaceful passing:


In Sorbin’s portrayal, Charles IX was an unrepentant king, free of any remorse or culpability. Wherever lay the truth, these two opposing descriptions resembled each other: they both instrumentalized repentance in order to shape the king’s image for political ends. Repentance was not here something private, nor was it used to appease the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, fostering reconciliation and closure through forgiveness; quite to the contrary, it acted as a powerful ideological weapon.

More dramatic politicizations of penance would occur after Charles IX’s death. When Henri III marched through the streets of Paris wearing a “sac du pénitent” in a number of spectacular penitential processions, the question of repentance was brought to

\footnote{Arnaud Sorbin, Oraison funèbre du tres hault, puissant et tres chrestien Roy de France ; Charles IX, piteux et debonnaire ; propugnateur de la Foy Catholique et amateur des bons esprits, prononcée en l’Eglise Nostre-Dame en Paris, le XII de juillet M.D.LXXIII, (Paris: Guillaume Chaudière), 1574, 8-9.}
center stage. In a radical departure from the devotional practices of previous monarchs, these austere ceremonies of mortification were meant to be entirely public, and played a direct role in the monarch’s governing strategies. By fashioning his government after a “penitential model,” Henri III instituted a new biopolitics (to borrow Foucault’s concept): for religious and political purposes, he chose to inscribe mortified bodies into the body politic. This transformation of repentance into a theological-political concept turned out to be both pervasive and enduring. When Henri III was unable to succeed in his attempt to pacify his subjects by restoring piety through this penitential school (“école de pénitence”), he found himself accused of hypocrisy and false repentance. Not only did his political authority falter, but the very penitential government that he had popularized was used against him in a series of insurrections that culminated in his assassination in 1589. Interestingly, his effort to shape the monarchy after a penitential model led not to the abandonment of public repentance, but rather to its proliferation. It became an instrument used for a variety of ends by competing parties. The numerous Ultra-Catholic Leaguer processions held in 1588-1589—the majority of which were meant to be insurrectional acts against Henry III—are some of the most striking examples of the ways in which repentance gradually transformed into a formidable political weapon. Penance, understood in this sense, was neither reconciliatory nor a means to recover innocence. It served to maintain and perpetuate violence.

With Henri IV and the end of the Wars of Religion, a shift occurred. The Bourbon king’s conversion to Catholicism took place in 1593, four long years after the death of Henri III. This event, viewed by many with considerable suspicion, gave repentance a new political meaning. Placed in the difficult position of having to restore order while
also dealing with the conflicting demands of Royalists seeking favor, Protestants disapproving of his conversion, and rebellious Leaguers pursuing his deposition, Henri IV adopted a new rhetoric of penance and forgiveness, allowing him and his supporters to strengthen his political authority and legitimacy. During the subjugation and the surrender of Paris in 1594, he took on the role of the merciful monarch dispensing forgiveness, progressively becoming, for his time and for posterity, the savior of France, the one who brought about the end of the Wars of Religion. Reconciliation, however, came at a price. When Henri IV issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, an act that instituted a bi-confessional state in France, repentance no longer stood at the core of the new politics of reconciliation and stability, but rather at its limits. Instead of acknowledging the atrocities of the war through institutionalized or public forms of repentance, which he could certainly have done, the king and his supporters sought to censor the past altogether. For Henri IV and his supporters, repentance no longer had a political use, except through its erasure. Although regular liturgical ceremonies of penance remained throughout the period, the explicitly politicized forms that had become widespread during the Valois king’s reign were subtly and gradually eliminated. Penance was returning to the private sphere—both for the king and the people. It had become more politically expedient to efface it and to forget the violence of the Wars of Religion. In the end, it is as if an older representation of penance had returned—a private and personal experience of self-fashioning akin to the one portrayed in Albrecht Dürer’s depiction of King David. But the memory of past violence still haunted the present. Perhaps not so paradoxically, it could be said that Henri IV’s politics of clemency and reconciliation, based on censorship
and “oubli,” maintained the question of repentance as a spectral presence in politics, preparing a series of returns of the repressed.

The present work represents an attempt to better understand the process by which repentance came to acquire an unprecedented political import during the second half of the sixteenth century. By shedding light on a variety of complex historical circumstances, it tries to show how repentance became more than a theological concept governing personal gestures of contrition and regret towards God and began to function as a political concept proper, for a time making the expression of personal penance depicted in Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut of King David a thing of the past.

This project also seeks to have relevance for the present. Considering the quite astounding reemergence of repentance that has recently taken place within our allegedly secularized Western societies, going back to a study of the concept in the sixteenth century can be considered a particularly timely endeavor. Indeed—and the recent #MeToo and #BalanceTonPorc movements in many ways confirm this—the injunction to repent and to ask for forgiveness, as Derrida had already argued at the turn of this century, has pervaded all aspects of society and political life. By offering a sixteenth-century genealogy of the concept, this work aims to participate in interdisciplinary debates that will be of interest to philosophers, historians, theologians, political theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, and many others who work on the influence of theological ideas in the political sphere. Repentance stands at the intersection between the public and the private, the political and the ethical: it is therefore not surprising that its use has not abated in politics today. As even the most cursory survey of our media will easily show,
political figures very regularly engage in public acts of repentance or apology in order to
protect or assert their legitimacy and moral integrity.

“I have sinned,” declared President Bill Clinton on September 11, 1998 in a public apology for the Monica Lewinsky affair. In front of an audience of more than a hundred ministers and other religious leaders, the President admitted that “to be forgiven, more than sorrow is required.” There needs to be “genuine repentance—a determination to change and to repair” self-made “breaches.” Criticized for not having been “contrite enough” during the first confession he had given in August of the same year, the president swore that this second repentance was sincere. Asking for forgiveness again, he assured his listeners: “I have repented,” and “will continue on the path of repentance, seeking pastoral support and that of other caring people so that they can hold me accountable for my own commitment.” One couldn’t think of a more obvious example of the blurring between the private and the public, the religious and the political. Clinton’s political legitimacy and moral integrity are inextricably bound to the reception of his public penance. For those convinced that it was sincere, his reputation was on the mend, but for those who believed it to be fake, a mere act of political expediency, his repentance seemed likely to stir up more opposition. Successfully performing public penance, in our political landscape, depends on striking the right tone and accommodating common perceptions of what the exercise should consist of in its theological-political form.

Those who, foregoing the exercise altogether, ostentatiously refuse to repent are still, wittily or unwittingly, in dialogue with this theological tradition. In an interview

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published in *Nice-Matin* on March 9, 2012, President Nicolas Sarkozy explicitly refused to adopt a discourse of repentance in relation to the role that France played during the Algerian War. He declared that although military operations in Algeria had been initiated by the French Republic and conducted under the authority of legitimate, democratically elected governments, “*la France ne peut pas se repentir d’avoir conduit cette guerre.*”13 Critics of this controversial political stance have pointed out that without reparation and some expression of remorse, the healing of historical traumas can seem all but impossible: how can trust be rebuilt between two communities when the acknowledgment of past crimes is absent and the government turns a blind eye to the demands made by the descendants of those who have suffered? The government’s refusal to amend for past injustices perpetrated against another country or community can complicate international relations and even potentially feed further animosity. The refusal to repent or to allow others to do so is not without its own political consequences.

This strategy of refusal can be contrasted with the example of post-apartheid South Africa, a nation-state that embraced radically different choices in relation to its history of violence. Established in 1995, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) used repentance as one of the main theological-political concepts driving the collective healing process. The TRC’s main objective, throughout the “forgiveness project,” was to identify the violations of human rights committed since 1960. Based on a court model of restorative justice, the commission, by allowing victims and perpetrators to confess and bear witness, recorded past wrongs, provided support and reparation, and

granted amnesty to some who admitted their participation in the crimes of the state. Instead of using harsh penalties and retributive justice against perpetrators, as had been the case during the Nuremberg trials, or simply attempting to erase the past, the new government adopted a strategy of full public disclosure and public repentance as a means to reconcile communities and establish consensual truths about the past. What was implicitly assumed, with the adoption of this Judeo-Christian model, was that repentance remained a valuable theological-political concept, and that it could serve to facilitate the politics of reconciliation by attenuating conflict.

Dounia Bouzar, an anthropologist working on the acceptance of Muslims in France, also understands repentance as a theological-political concept that is socially useful. In a 2017 news report commemorating the victims of Charlie Hebdo, a “repentant jihadist” named Farid Benyettou, the ex-ringleader of the extremist network in the Buttes-Chaumont area, was interviewed to discuss his experience of having been the ex-mentor of Chérif Kouachi. Wearing a small pin on his bag stating “Je suis Charlie,” he openly confessed his faults and discussed the role he played in Kouachi’s indoctrination. What are we to make of this act of public penance? According to Bouzar, we need such repentant jihadists in order to deal with the problem of radicalization: “C’est le radicalisé lui-même qui doit être amené à argumenter à partir des éléments rapportés par les repentis pour prendre la mesure du décalage entre ce qui lui a été promis et les réalités.”14 For her, repentance is a crucial process that is necessary for breaking the ideological indoctrination of extremist forms of religious devotion like jihadism. It has a

social and moral function: it allows jihadists to slowly understand and come to terms with their fault while also teaching them tolerance of others.

All of these examples make it clear that repentance is far from having disappeared from public discourse. In fact, quite the contrary seems true. In *Le Siècle et le pardon*, Jacques Derrida sees the resurgence of this kind of theological-political discourse as being symptomatic of a generalized “géopolitique du pardon.” According to him, the Christian language of forgiveness and repentance has become so prevalent in politics that, no longer limited to the West, it now pervades the political sphere in non-European and non-biblical cultures: “*Je pense à ces scènes où un Premier ministre japonais ‘demanda pardon’ aux Coréens et aux Chinois pour les violences passées.*”¹⁵ This cross-cultural translation of the language of repentance is, for Derrida, the symptom of a Christian overdetermination of the rhetoric of law and of politics at a global level, a process he calls “mondialatinisation.” To repent, to ask for forgiveness, is to enter the sphere of political theology. We must ask, he states: “*Qui pardonne ou qui demande pardon à qui, à quel moment ? Qui en a le droit ou le pouvoir ? “Qui pardonne à qui ?” Que signifie ici le “qui”?”¹⁶ Individuals, communities, professional corporations, the representatives of ecclesiastical hierarchies, sovereigns, and heads of state all engage in scenes of repentance and ask for forgiveness, but the theological-political implications of their actions differ greatly according to who is speaking, *in what name* they are speaking,

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and why.\textsuperscript{17}

It is precisely this resurgence of a theological-political discourse today that desperately needs to be reevaluated both nationally and globally. Approaching a question historically, in a seemingly radically different context, can prove extremely fruitful for developing a critical gaze on these different understandings of penance. Without engaging in uncritical anachronistic thinking, the person studying the early modern period will inevitably unsettle received and unquestioned ideas. This project stemmed from a desire to explore the archeology of a phenomenon that is of universal interest in a global context more than ever troubled by the politicization of religious concepts.

PART 1
MORTIFYING THE BODY POLITIC:
THE EXTENSION OF REPENTANCE INTO THE PUBLIC SPHERE
On March 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1583, at the convent of the Grands-Augustins on the rive gauche of the Seine river, a procession of penitents from the newly founded order of the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame started its march towards the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris and the heart of the Île de la Cité.\textsuperscript{1} Led by a man carrying a crucifix, the penitents, praying and chanting psalms, biblical litanies, and hymns from the Holy Sacrament walked solemnly along the streets. Distracted from the activities of their daily lives by the music coming from the direction of the confrères, Parisians paused as they watched the procession pass in front of their doors and shops. Although the sober and refined tone of the polyphonic motets and the harmonious canticles conveyed a mood of veneration, obliging many to acknowledge this penitential scene perhaps by genuflecting and crossing themselves in reverence, the unconventional religious attire of the penitents gave them somewhat of a shock: donning what would become the notorious “sac du penitent,” a fully hooded white Holland habit covering the face and leaving only two slits for the eyes, the penitents were an unusual sight to behold (see

\textsuperscript{1} See Edmond Auger, Metanocologie sur le suget de l’Archicongregation des Penitens de l’Annonciation de nostre Dame, et de toutes telles autres devotieuses assemblées en l’Église Sainte, (Paris: Jamet Mettayer), 1584.
The rain, which started to drench the sackcloths, added to the strange atmosphere, as several of the commentators noted. But nothing was quite as striking to the public as the figure of Henri III: wearing the same hooded habit as the other penitents, with no distinctive sign that hinted at his social rank, he was the procession’s most prominent participant who was symbolically reduced to quasi-anonymity. After marching alongside the other penitents in his “sac mouillé,” he knelt down in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame and sung the traditional Salve Regina in celebration of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin.

Among the reasons that have been given to explain the king’s participation in penitential devotions such as this one, the most obvious one is that he hoped they would help him conceive an heir. According to Mark Greengrass, for example, Henri III’s and Louise de Lorraine’s frequent prayers, fasts, retreats, pilgrimages, and processions must primarily be viewed as part of a “disciplined penitence for reasons of the state”:

Prayers were drafted in 1581. Royal letters urged localities to undertake parochial and civic processions on a daily and weekly basis for the year beginning in Advent 1581 and a plenary indulgence was sought from Rome to encourage those who participated in them. The response was widespread, although some Protestants refused to join in. The king’s involvement was highly publicized, beginning with his participation in solemn processions in Paris. Thereafter, the king undertook regular processions every Friday. In January 1582, he went on his first much-publicized pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Chartres, accompanied by the queen. The processional calendar was strengthened by the grant of a papal jubilee in aid of the national intercessions in the following Lent. The first reports of the king’s intention to found a community of penitents were to foster the movement in aid of a royal heir.

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2 For all figures in this chapter, see appendix 1.


Although it can indeed be argued that, in 1581, the king’s desire to have a son was one of the initial causes of his sudden outpouring of devotional activity, by 1582-1583, his religious practices could not be explained by this reason alone: as Pierre Chevallier stated, “il avait pris goût à la dévotion.”5 Edmond Auger, the king’s Jesuit confessor, also remarked that the king’s fervor was “prodigieuse.”6 In fact, the king’s deep and sustained shift towards devotion and personal piety greatly exceeded the circumstances that might have initiated it. Another explanation sometimes offered regarding the king’s processions is that penance soon became for him a means of defending the nation against Protestantism. According to the king’s secretary, Jules Gassot, Henri III believed that it was by his own example of piety and devotion that he would be able to bring Huguenots back into the Catholic fold: “par ceste voye douce et par son exemple de devotion, il en attiroit [ceux de la Religion prétendue reformée] beaucoup plus de se remectre au giron de S’e Eglise.”7 The king was said to be convinced that, instead of outright war, penance was a more pacific means of reuniting Protestants with Catholics and that his exemplary “école de pénitence” could reach the souls of the “lost” and reunite the nation with God. If both interpretations reflect important aspects of the question surrounding the king’s processions, they fail to account for the fact that repentance soon became for Henri III a style of


6 Jacqueline Boucher, “Henri III, mondia ou dévot? Ses retraites dans les monastères de la région parisienne,” Cahiers d’histoire, 15 (1970), 120. According to A. Lynn Martin, the relationship between Henri III and Edmond Auger began in 1568 when the latter was chaplain to the royal forces led by the young Henry, who then held the title of the Duke of Anjou. Auger was also with the future king at the battles of Jarnac and Montcontour. The chaplain was impressed with Henri for he “acted as if he were on a religious retreat rather than leading an army—he confessed and communicated often, fasted, prayed, kept holy days, and went to Auger’s sermons.” (A. Lynn Martin, Henri III and the Jesuit Politicians, Genève: Droz, 1973, 16, 50).

governance. His spiritual conversion led him to widely promote practices and to found institutions that specifically placed repentance at the heart of politics. If only for the sheer scope of the shift considered here, the significance of the procession that took place on March 25, 1583 cannot be reduced to a call for divine intercession in ensuring the continuity of the crown, nor can it be only understood as an attempt to reconcile Protestants and Catholics or to rebuild a war-torn country. Henri III, who had instituted this confraternity of Penitents—referred to by some as “the Flagellants”—initiated that day what would become an entirely new politics of repentance, the effects of which would alter the course of his reign as well as the following one. This procession represented an unconventional mobilization of penance (rarely had a king repented publically in such a theatrical way), one that was reflective of a developing ambiguity and confusion between a private understanding of penance and its theological-political uses in the fraught context of the Wars of Religion. In the following years, not only did Henri III implement a number of political measures that specifically sought to reshape the public sphere according to a penitential model, but his personal interpretation of repentance impacted the concept itself, ultimately serving to redefine it with consequences lasting well into Henri IV’s reign. In order to better grasp the stakes of this transformation, the actual governing strategies and methods Henri III supported during the 1580s need to be examined in detail. What theological-political justifications allowed him to be portrayed and used as an exemplary figure of repentance? How did Henri III become one of the most active founders and promoters of penitential congregations and a proponent of the transference of austere monastic models into the political sphere? After addressing these questions, our discussion will shift to an examination of the ways in which these practices in fact modified—or attempted to modify—the social life of the individuals concerned. Larger ethical implications were at stake, and the effects of the king’s policies on the social and
moral life of his subjects turned out to be profound and long lasting. The king’s penitential politics in fact seemed to call for new ways of living. They involved changing one’s lifestyle and the way one inhabited a community, with the ultimate goal of altering the course of human actions. The mobilization of repentance sought to usher in a new ethos, a restructuring of morality according to a new set of rules. To untangle a few of the ways in which penance came to take on such importance and indeed reshape the religious and political landscape of the 1580s, we must begin by an examination of the very figure around whom repentance crystalized—Henri III.

*The King’s Exemplary Penance*

Henri III’s decision to create the *Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame* and to march through Paris in a sackcloth was not born *ex nihilo*. By the end of the seventh War of Religion (1579-1580), along with the plague running rampant in cities throughout the North, France had been left in such a state of devastation that Catholics started to believe that the dreadful situation was God’s punishment and fell under the spell of a “*grande pulsation d’angoisse eschatologique*.” In 1583, many reacted to this *ira Dei* by taking part in public processions, and a surge of penitential devotion spread throughout Northern France in

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villages such as Notre-Dame de Liesse, as well as in cities such as Reims, Amiens, and Meaux.9

In Champagne, the memorialist Jean Pussot described the widespread phenomenon of shared religious emotions:

Ceste année [1583] fut ce peuple de France et principalement de ce pays [Champagne] fort esmeu de dévotion; de sorte que chacun par villes et villages faisoient grandes processions : Et commencèrent environ la mye juillet et continuans jusques en fin d’octobre : le peuple estant revestu de linge blanc, tousjours en bon ordre. Durant lesquelles estoit porté le Corpus Domini, le peuple chantant de diverses sortes de cantiques, prières, litanies, psaulmes, et versets de proses, comme les Ave Maria, des Proses de la Nativité et Assomption Nostre Dame, Deus benigne, stabat Mater, christi fideles, Avertes faciem et plusieurs autres choses de grande dévotion. De sorte que, c’estoit une chose admirable, tellement que plusieurs gros catholiques et froids en dévotion furent alors eschaulfez et affectez en icelles voyant et considérant entre aultre chose les bons villageois n’apprêthens point la saison, le temps de leurs moissons et vendanges, et sans avoir esgard à aulcuns prouffitz ou dommages, laissoient leurs villages pour faire sy longues et diverses processions. […]10

From mid-July to the end of October, a sense of desperation as well as the fear of imminent punishment moved villagers to atone for their sins before God. They were so swept up in penitential devotion that they neglected their livelihoods in order to partake in the processions, kindling even the faith of more tepid Catholics of a higher social rank. In the Statuts de la Congregation des penitens de l’Annonciations de Nostre Dame, Edmond Auger, the king’s Jesuit confessor, also subscribed in unambiguous terms to this wave of devout atonement: “en ce temps nous avons tresgrand besoin de faire penitence, et par prieres, jeusnes, ausmones, et autres bonnes œuvres, destourner l’ire de Dieu que nous voyons sur nous, par les maux qui nous

9 As Frances Yates claimed, 1583 was deemed the year of processions in Paris. See Frances Yates, “Religious processions in Paris, 1583-4,” in Astrae. Le symbolisme impérial au XVIe siècle, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 173; In “Recherches sur les processions blanches (1583-1584),” Denis Crouzet reconstructs, as best as is possible, the geographical regions through which the “processions blanches” passed, such as Amiens, Abbeville, Noyon, Boissons, Laon, Notre-Dame de Liesse, Notre-Dame de l’Epine, Chalons, Reims, Beauvais, Senlis, Meaux, and Paris.

10 Jean Pussot, Journalier ou mémoires, 18-19.
When he marched alongside the penitents, Henri III was thus taking part in a wider movement that he, as Denis Crouzet rightly notes, had not initiated. What made him able to cast himself, however, as its central and exemplary figure was not only a political will to do so—stemming from the fact that it ultimately served strategic purposes—but a more immediate affinity: such processions deeply resonated with his own religious inclinations and sensibilities. Already in 1581, observers at his court had remarked changes in his “language, with more references to ‘conscience’ and to his ‘fear of displeasing God.’” In 1582, he had written a letter to Arnaud Du Ferrier, the Venetian ambassador, in which he appeared entirely convinced that divine wrath had descended on the country: “Notre Seigneur veut étendre son ire sur nous et nous admonester par ce châtiment de changer de voies et avoir recours à sa bonté par bonnes oeuvres.” The shift from simply adhering to the credo of civil and religious war as God’s punishment to taking the lead in a widespread and far-reaching politics of repentance was in fact not as surprising as it might seem: if the king stood over his subjects, he must also show greater repentance before God for their sufferings, even be ready to bear alone the collective sins of the community. Already in 1578, in

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12 It is important to remember, as Denis Crouzet has shown, that Henri III was not the generator of this penitential movement: “[…] dès 1664 l’historien de Soissons, C. Dormay, affirme que “le commencement de ces processions vint de la piété de Henri III qui establit une confrarie de Pénitents aux Augustins le 20 mars “et que quelques mois après, “à l’exemple de la capitale,” les villes et villages de Champagne et Picardie se mirent en marche. Dans cette ligne, les processions blanches ont été par erreur identifiées à des processions de pénitents.” (“Recherches sur les processions blanches,” 75-6).


14 Pierre Chevallier, Henri III: roi Shakespearien, 543. Chevallier does not give the exact bibliography of his quoted sources, so I was unable to verify the letter or its date, but he is an excellent historian, so it is most likely accurate.
a letter to the same addressee, Henri III had underscored the role his personal penance played in the destiny of the kingdom and in effect provided a theoretical rationale for his actions in the later parts of his reign:

J’ay pris en très-bonne part la sage et vertueuse requeste que vous m’avez faicte par la fin de vostre lettre, sachant qu’elle procède du zèle très-ardent que vous portez à l’honneur de Dieu, qui est le vray fondement de toutes les bonnes œuvres et au bien de mon service, vous priant croire que je n’ay rien plus recommandé que de satisfaire, en cela, au devoir auquel je suis obligé, connoissant que c’est le seul moyen par lequel je doibs espérer tirer mes sujets de misères et calamités qui les affligent, lesquels je confesse proceder de mes vices et péchés. Et, quand il plairoit à sa divine bonté que, seul, j’en portasse la pénitence, pour le salut et rédemption de tant de pauvre et désolé peuple qu’il a soumis sous ma puissance, lequel succumbe sous le faix, je m’estimerois très-heureux.  

In a Christic gesture of self-sacrifice, the king is convinced that he must expiate the sins of the nation. A model of royal exemplarity must appease the wrath of God. His vices were the reason why France found itself in such a miserable state (the “misères et calamités” beleaguering his subjects seemed to find their main source in his “vices et péchés”). Therefore, in order to restore peace and save his people, the king, in this letter, appeared to see no other choice than to affirm his unconditional repentance before God, which could have no substitute nor be delegated: “[…] que seul, j’en portasse la pénitence, pour le salut et rédemption de tant de pauvre et désolé peuple.”

By 1583, the monarch’s sense of personal responsibility and commitment to penance had reached a turning point. Already naturally inclined to value repentance, he now embraced it with an unusual fervor, just as processions, coming from Northern France, materialized in and around Paris. Influenced by his confessors (the Italian bishop Charles Borromée and Edmond Auger),

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16 Ibid.
the king was in fact moved to believe that the ruin of the state and the misfortunes of his subjects necessitated a more meaningful and spectacular sign of royal expiation and sacrifice. His participation in the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame—again, an institution he had himself founded—set in motion a new stage in his commitment to penance. When he began to publically march alongside the members of this congregation, the effect was powerful: by officially bringing penance to the forefront of politics and overtly fashioning himself as the leader and focal point of this penitential movement, Henri III brought about a new theological-political relationship with his subjects. In La Confirmation Apostolique de l’Archicongregation des Penitens, de l’Annonciation de nostre Dame à Paris, Pope Gregory XIII was impressed by the king’s humble example of penance and his creation of a new penitential congregation, which he saw more fundamentally as a means of strengthening the unity of theology and politics—or, rather, the subordination of politics to theology:

C’est un excellent et notable secours que l’Eglise universelle reçoit des Princes Christiens, quand eux-mêmes, ravalant la grandeur de leur puissance, pour s’employer à gouverner leur peuple, comme fait Dieu, justement, rendent le service qu’ils doivent à la religion Catholique, vrai appui de l’estat assuré des Royaumes, servant ainsi d’un vif exemple à leurs sujets, d’estre vertueux, et de s’acquitter soigneusement du devoir qu’ils ont premierement à Dieu (à qui certes l’on doit le tout), apres à eux-mêmes, et puis à leurs souverains, en quoi s’estant si richement fait paraistre la vertu et piété de nostre trescher fils, Henri Troisiesme, treschretien Roi de France, parmi tant de troubles de son Roiaume, nous avons l’occasion d’en remercier Dieu infiniement.18

Exhibiting morally exemplary behavior by way of penance, the king became a model of piety, an ideal figure to imitate (“servant ainsi d’un vif exemple”), and a living proof of the greatness of

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17 Denis Crouzet, “Recherches sur les processions blanches (1583-1584),” 531. See also Édouard Frémy, Henri III pénitent, étude sur les rapports de ce prince avec diverses confréries et communautés parisiennes (Paris: Féchoz, 1885), 7.

the universal church. When Edmond Auger—in *Metanoeologie*, an encomiastic text specifically written in defense of the *Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame*—referred to the perfectly symbiotic relationship ideally existing between a king and his people, he also underscored a one-way process of political and ethical emulation:

> L’on sçait que la teste en nostre corps preside, et donne les mouvemens à tout le reste, et le chef en oeconomie et police, est à la verité celui qui donne loi à toutes les actions des inferieurs, *plus par son exemple*, que par sa parole, et ordonnance, d’autant que tous ont l’œil plus ouvert à regarder ce qu’il fait que l’aureille à escouter ce qu’il dit, n’estant le peuple qu’un Cameleon, prompte à prendre les couleurs de son Prince,

> *Tout le monde du Roi les actions contemple*  
> *Pour du tout façonner ses mœurs à son exemple.*

Worthy of note is the fact that the king’s exemplarity, in this passage, is twice naturalized through metaphors. Not only are the subjects animalized (like the chameleon, they cannot help but imitate: their copying is instinctual and corporeal), but the nation itself is understood through the traditional medieval metaphor of the *res publica* as a corporeal entity, with the king as the head and the people as the limbs. Context tells us that far from gratuitously evoking an old *topos*, Auger is here calling the reader’s attention to the political strategy that Henri III himself was attempting to implement as he hoped that his penitential exemplarity would flow outwards to his people and pacify the nation. By staging his exemplary penance, the king became the means by which political and religious forces could again work together, not in dangerous confusion, but in a perfect harmony that maintained the distinction between the two (while of course, at least in the eyes of some theologians, affirming the dominance of the religious over the political). For

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19 Auger, *Metanoeologie*, 89-90, (my emphasis). “[…] ce que le fondateur le beau premier à faict en sa personne, et puis le fruit qui s’en est veu apres naistre en d’autres à son exemple, depuis que Dieu l’inspira d’arborer, comme l’on dit, ceste enseigne de Penitence […]” (91)
Auger, the king, in making himself an example of religious fervor, had launched upon a path that would finally reestablish the right balance between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*:

Les Sages qui ont voulu embellir la dignité Roiale du degré de Prestrisse, ne se sont point oubliés de distinguer l’un de l’autre, et en tirer dehors le meslange, de meilleure façon que les Aegiptiens et Romains, chés qui toutes les deux charges en un mesme suget estoient confuses, mais leur motif fut de graver au cœur des Monarques, que comme en chaque homme privé, l’ame, et le corps s’entrecommandent, et s’entreservent à tour, pour fortifier leur commun estre, ainsi és Roiaumes et republiques, où le droit divin et l’humain lient le tout, le Prince doit conspirer avec le gouverneur des Consciences, si, que et la police et la religion s’entresseurantes, eternisent, si faire se peut, l’estat entier, qui sans ceste diamantine soudeure, ne peut faillir de bien tost esclatter et rompre.\(^\text{20}\)

According to this vision, the prince must work together with the “gouverneur des Consciences” to unite both the secular and religious world, for the spiritual and the temporal could easily break apart if not carefully welded—only a “diamantine soudeure,” a brilliantly soldered joint, precious and rare, can hold them together. A worthy heir to a political genealogy that included all kings who defended law and justice, Henry III became for Auger the perfect remedy for the corruptions that had stricken the Church and the nation in recent years:

Or puisque de cest ancien estoc, Sire, vous estes une tresnoble, et tres-religieuese tige, heritier de pareille et Couronne et Sceptre, nai sous un mesme ciel, nourri d’aussi bonne main, voité au service de mesme Maistresse, falloit-il pas, que tout ainsi que au milieu de ses persecutions sanglantes, votre victorieux bouclier l’avoit r’asseurée, aussi par vous, remise en paix, telle que les rudes bigareures du tems pouvoient permettre, elle fust repeuplée, et remeublée de ses belles parures anciennes, qui sont la devotion, la piété, la mortification, l’humilite, la penitence, la Communion, l’abstinence, la modestie, l’aumosne, et une solide et entiere reformation de vie ? Pour à quoi mieux pouvoir attaindre, le S. Esprit, votre patron, et guide, vous a faict commencer ce reiglement par vostre propre vie, conscience, et contenance, de sorte qu’en vous ravalant vous mesmes sous les loix d’une eschole de Penitence, y avez veu à votre exemple enrooler des troupes, qui pour leur qualité, prenant bien le mords en bouche contre la chair, et le monde, il sera bien aisé de faire jaillir les estincelles de ceste braise, à travers le taillis des cœurs de la plupart de vos meilleurs sugets, pour les enflammer du feu que le Crucifix alluma en terre pour le veoir ardre, car par tout ou, entre nous François, les

The king’s penance was to inspire the troops of the Church—that is, all those who had become part of the newly-founded congregation—who in turn were to draw in a wider penitential school (“eschole de Penitence”), beyond the strict limits of the order, the best of the king’s subjects, enflaming them with the love of Christ. For the Jesuit confessor of the king, who is here using a series of old topoi, there was no such thing as an instantaneous and unmediated exemplarity. The king’s public acts of repentance were to travel down different societal layers, first reaching the most religious and most enlightened of his subjects, who responded to them intellectually and ethically, then trickling down to those (“les petits”) who followed as much by imitation as by reason.

In the end, according to Auger, the integration of penance into Henri III’s personal life served a political function as much as a religious one: the king’s subjects, by following his example, entered a new system of obedience and order in which repentance played a regulating role. To rule correctly meant implementing the laws of a penitential school that would serve as a guide for the entire nation. Like a master forming his disciples, the king was to lead his subjects to spiritual conversion and help them spring into new life, transforming their vision of the world. Justly commanding meant knowing how to use repentance as a means to wage war against “sin.”

To what extent is Henri III’s politics of repentance, for which he cast himself as an exemplary figure, exceptional in the context of sixteenth-century political thought? In truth, all the monarchs of the period had sought to reinforce royal dignity by associating themselves with Christian imagery. Considered the mediator between human society and the sacred order of the

universe, the sovereign used his court and government to develop his own religious persona. Francis I was not just the “le Père et le restaurateur des Lettres,” he was also the “Roi Très-Chrétien.” The court was more than just the king’s political entourage: it was, as Nicolas Le Roux noted, a kind of “microcosme exemplaire dont le gouvernement devait fournir un modèle moral à l’ensemble du royaume.”22 The French monarchy also had a long tradition of attempting to govern the souls of its subjects (“le gouvernement des âmes”23). Representing a Christian model of exemplary behavior was thus in no way a new concept for princes and monarchs. To take only one example, the well-known ethical treatises of the Miroirs des Princes (Specula principium) were specifically designed to educate the young dauphins according to Christian moral principles, with the goal of turning them into exemplary figures fit for government.

However, Henri III’s investment in fashioning his court and political identity according to a model of penitential exemplarity was unlike anything that had been seen in previous reigns.24 To be sure, a few important political events in which penance played a part had taken place earlier in the sixteenth century. Francis I, for instance, had marched in two expiatory processions—one on June 12, 1528, after the statue of a Virgin Mary had been mutilated, and another one, on January 21, 1535, after the Affair of the Placards. Both processions had sought to reaffirm the primacy of Catholic faith against the aggressions of Reformers. On July 4, 1549 and December 27, 1551, Henri II had also participated in a couple of processions after the destruction


23 See chapter 6 of Nicolas Le Roux’s Le Roi, La Cour, L’État: De la Renaissance à l’absolutisme.

24 Louis IX or Saint Louis (1214-1270) is perhaps the only other monarch who adopted austere devotional practices comparable to what Henri III would embrace in the latter half of the sixteenth century. In fact, references to this king were often used to defend Henri III’s own penitential practices.
of a statue of the Virgin Mary. Charles IX had done the same in 1567. Most of these rulers, however, showed little eagerness to truly exploit penitential processions more than what was necessary: instances of exemplary piety and penance were only staged in response to exceptional circumstances and were overall short-lived.

Henri III, on the contrary, soon implemented a series of new and unconventional political initiatives that would place penance at the center of the public and private spheres. To further understand some the theological-political implications of this new emphasis placed on repentance during his reign, we must now turn to the actual governing strategies the king and his followers adopted as they sought to advance this penitential model.

*Henri III’s Promotion of Monasticism: the Care of the Self as a Model for Society at Large*

As penitence took center stage in his politics, Henri III became involved in religious penitential orders and confraternities. At the beginning of his reign, in 1574, he had already shown an interest in penance when he participated in a procession of the Battus (Battuti) in Avignon. But in 1582-1583, when he experienced a definitive spiritual conversion, he began to

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26 I am using the terms “public” and “private” here more or less according to their modern usage except when stated otherwise; however, it is important to note that, with the emergence of the Nation-State, the modern distinction between public and private realms emerged much later during the seventeenth- and eighteenth century. See Morton J. Horwitz, “The history of the private/public distinction,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 130, No. 6 (Jun., 1982), 1423-1428; Duncan Kennedy, “The Stages of the Decline of the Public/Private Distinction,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 130, No. 6 (Jun., 1982), 1349-1357.

actively endorse and create a number of religious institutions—and particularly monastic ones—centered on the concept of repentance.\textsuperscript{28} Such actions would transform the religious landscape of the 1580s and determine the place repentance played in politics for years to come.

The first major penitential institution Henri III founded was, as we have seen, the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame, a project that had for some time been close to his heart, a point that he made clear in an addendum to Metanoeologie: “Messieurs aient depuis quelque tems désiré pour l’honneur, et la gloire de Dieu, instituer une Congregation de Penitens […].”\textsuperscript{29} Although this congregation was the one that would come to be associated, more than any other, with the king’s penitential politics, he also had a hand in the creation of a number of other religious orders and confraternities.\textsuperscript{30} In August of 1583, François de Joyeuse, the archbishop of Narbonne, who was personally associated with the king (both of his brothers, Anne de Joyeuse and Henri de Joyeuse, were Henri III’s favorites), founded the Confrarie des pénitents bleus de Saint-Jérôme in Paris (see figure 7).\textsuperscript{31} Two years later, the bishop of Paris, Pierre de Gondi, created the Pénitents noirs du Saint Crucifix as well as the


\textsuperscript{29} Auger, Metanoeologie, n.p. (first addendum). Henri III also founded the chivalric Order of the Holy Spirit (Ordre du St. Esprit) in 1578. See figures 4 and 5.

\textsuperscript{30} This chapter is limited to demonstrating the ways in which Henri III promoted male monastic orders and confraternities. See Barbara Diefendorf’s excellent study on the role women played in promoting penance and charity during the late sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century. (From penitence to charity: pious women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

\textsuperscript{31} The Compagnie royale des Pénitents bleus de St. Jérôme de Toulouse was originally founded on September 29, 1575 by the archbishop, Georges d’Armagnac, and Jean-Étienne de Duranti, the Premier Président of parlement of Toulouse. Edmond Auger, however, wrote the statutes of the confraternity in 1576, which were approved by Pope Gregory XIII on December 5, 1578 under the name Confrérie des Penitents bleus de St Jérôme de Toulouse.
Pénitents gris (the latter through the protection of Bernando d’Osimo, who was the guardian of the Capuchin friary of the faubourg Saint-Honoré). Not only did all three of these congregations adhere to king’s penitential politics, but they also often performed alongside the monarch’s processions. Henri III was furthermore known to go on retreats with these penitents, during which he adopted their habit and participated in their processions. In 1587, Pierre Victor Palma Cayet also mentioned that Henri III had built oratories for the Pénitents bleus and wore the gray sackcloth of the Pénitents gris. So tight was the link between Henri III and these congregations that he actually had his personal Swiss guards dressed in the habit of the Pénitents gris: “le Roy s’exerce en œuvres pieuses, il fait faire des oratoires pour les Jeronimites au bois de Vincennes: comme il est vestu de gris, il en fait aussi vestir les Suisses de sa garde [...].” The color of the habit, of course, referred to the gray ashes of penance, which the poet Amadis Jadyn evoked in “Du gris, au Roy,” an encomiastic sonnet dedicated to the king.


35 “Si vous aimez le gris, vous ainez patience / Conjoincte aux bonnes mœurs et à l’humilité, / Au travail esperant, à la fidelité, / Qui mettent soubz le pied toute folle arrogance. / / Les sainctz religieux qui preschent l’abstinance  / Vestent d’un habit gris leur simple austerité: / Mille pierres d’eslite en parent leur beauté, / Mille fleurs sur les champs en parent leur substance. / / Les cendres, demeurant de tous feux consommez, / Sont grises, et aussi mille corps estimez / D’animaux endrans patiemment la peine. / L’amant ami du fer s’habille tout de gris: / En la terre et au ciel il est d’excellent prix, / Doncques si vous l’ainez ce n’est une amour vaine.” (Amadis Jamyn, Oeuvres poétiques, Avec sa vie par Guillaume Colletet d’après le manuscrit incendié au Louvre et Introduction par Charles Brunet, Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1967, 128).
In 1584, after making sure that the Hieronymites found their home in a monastery in the bois de Vincennes, Henri III also founded a confraternity called the Oratoire de Notre-Dame de vie-saine. The king’s secretary, Jules Gassot, who was a member of this society, remarked that Henri III would choose a few confrères from this group to participate in devotions during specific days of the year, “comme à la Purification, à la Nostre Dame de mars, la Magdelaine, la St Hierosme.”

Gassot—who Henri III often sent to Rome in order to settle his affairs related to the creation of penitential congregations and having indulgences ratified—was convinced that, although such extraordinary acts of devotion were not truly necessary for the king (“combien que telles devotions extraordinaires ne fussent pas tant nécessaires à luy”), no one should be upset or surprised if he took pleasure in them. After all, according to Gassot, Henri III felt that other kings were allowed to go hunting and to partake in honest recreational activities: “[…] aux aultres roys il leur est tant permis d’aller à la chasse et aultres exercices et prendre encore d’aultres honnestes recreations, l’on ne debvoit trouver mauvais si, pour peu de jours, il se complaisoit en telles extraordinaires devotions […].”

The king’s enthusiasm for such congregations did not wane. By 1587, impressed with their ascetic lifestyle and moral behavior, he had also founded a new congregation of Feuillants in Paris, based on the reformed Cistercian order located near Toulouse and led by Jean de La

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37 Gassot, Sommaire-Mémoire, 158.

38 Ibid., 159.
Barrière. They, also, often participated in Henri III’s processions. When Jean de La Barrière, who was known for his extreme piety, arrived in Paris for the first time, the king was particularly moved by his faith and even expressed the desire to have him remain at his court, but the Feuillant could not be swayed into abandoning his religious congregation.

The mendicant Order of Minims, the Franciscan order of Capuchins, and the Jesuits—which established themselves in France during the 1560s and 1580s—were also incorporated into the religious and political projects of the king. Although Henri III did not found these orders, he was particularly drawn to them for the same reasons he was drawn to the other congregations: they all privileged a particularly austere form of penance. The religious vows of

39 Bernard de Montgaillard was appointed to be the prior of the Feuillant monastery created in Paris. However, the original congregation began in 1577 at Labastide-Clermont, near Toulouse, under the direction of Jean de La Barrière. See Benoist Pierre, La bure et le sceptre: la congrégation des Feuillants dans l’affirmation des États et des pouvoirs princiers (vers 1560-vers 1660), (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006).

40 For more information on the letters Henri III sent to Jean de La Barrière, see Michel Simonin, “Montaigne et les Feuillants,” Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France, 97e Année, No. 4 (Jul. – Aug. 1997), 523-549. Pierre de l’Estoile also gives us an account of the king’s initial reaction to seeing the Feuillant in Paris for the first time: “Au commencement d’aoust, un Bernadin, nommé de la Barre, Tolozain, abbé d’une abbaye de Bernadins sise à 5 à 6 lieues de Toulouze, appelée Feoillans, vinst à Paris, où il prescha devant le Roy, les Roines et les princes et seigneurs de la Court et en quelques autres eglises: où il fut suivi et admiré de tous ceux qui ouïrent ses predications et entendirent l’austerité de sa vie. Car il ne mangeoit que du pain et des herbes, alloit par les champs, pieds nuds et teste nue, ne beuvoit que de l’eau, couchoit ordinairement sur la dure; avoit en son abbaye septant ou quatre vingts religieux qu’il y avoit introduits, vivans de mesme façon; recevoit honnestement et traittoient bien ceux qui l’alloient visiter en son abbaye. Apres le service fait en son eglise, travailloit et faisoit travailler tous les religieux, qui d’un art, qui d’un autre, envoioit à Toulouze vendre ce qui pouvoit rester de leurs besoin, emploioit les deniers et le surplus du revenu de l’abbaye en bienfaits et ausmones, ne retenant de tout pour lui et ses religieux […] Le Roy, l’aiant fait venir à Paris pour le voir et ouïr, le voulut retenir pres de lui; mais le bon abbé s’en excusa, disant que puisqu’il avoit plue à Dieu et au St. Pere de le commetter à la garde de sa bergerie de Foeillans, qu’il ne pouvoit en saine conscience faire moins que, s’y en retournant, faire la vieille sur son troupeau.” (Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, tome IV, 94-95).

41 Saint Francis of Paola founded the mendicant Order of Minims (Ordo Minimorum) in Italy in the fifteenth century. It was Albert de Gondi, marshal of France, who helped introduce and develop the meridional congregation. With his wife, Claude-Catherine de Clermont, and his brother, the bishop of Paris, Pierre de Gondi, he founded the convent of Minims on his seigneurie of Noisy to the West of Paris. As for the Jesuits, Louis de Gonzague, duke of Nevers, and his wife, Henriette de Clèves, installed the Society of Jesus in Nevers in 1572 to reaffirm Catholic identity in the capital of their duchy. According to A. Lynn Martin, early in 1582, Henry III was very favorable to this society, offering even to establish a Jesuit college and giving a large grant to the order annually. See A. Lynn Martin, The Jesuit Mind: the Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France, (Ithaca : Cornell university press, 1988).
the Minims, for example, not only included chastity, poverty, and obedience, but their Rule also compelled them to take a strict vow of the “Lenten way of life” (vita quadragesimalis), that is to say, one bound by penitential asceticism (fasting, mortification, and self-abnegation). The Society of Jesus took similar vows as the Minims except with a fourth vow of direct of obedience to the pope, and the Franciscan order of Capuchins were likewise known for their extreme austerity, simplicity, and poverty. Towards the end of his reign, the king became closely involved with the latter order. In 1586, after having had a house built next to their monastery for his convenience, he also decided to institute a new confraternity—the Oratoire et compagnie du benoist Saint François—in honor of their founder, St Francis of Assisi.42

The king’s support and reinforcement of these particular monastic orders and congregations seemed first and foremost to reflect his own theological perspective. Although it might be impossible to pinpoint their exact nuances, a careful reading of Metanoeologie sur le suget de l’Archicongregation des Penitens de l’Annonciation de nostre Dame can give us a better understanding of the king’s own views on penance: not only was this text—which we have already quoted from—written by Henri III’s close religious advisor, Edmond Auger, with the goal of explaining to a wider public the philosophy of the monarch’s penitential congregation, but its two paratextual addenda were actually signed by Henri III, which suggests that the Jesuit’s reflections were likely to be a close exposition of the king’s own perspective on the topic.43 Theorizing at length on the type of repentance promoted by the king’s congregation,


43 The first paratextual addendum is the transcription of a discourse dictated by the king that was read aloud to the penitents by Edmond Auger. In it, Henri III warns future adherents not to take membership into the congregation lightly: “[…] je vous prie, à fin que si y voulés entrer, ce soit pour y satisfaire, et contenter non moi, ains celui à qui vostre Roi mesme doit toute satisfacion, comme le moindre, et duquel depend le principal bien, et de luy, et de vous tous. […] je ne soufrirois aucunement que par fiction, ou aultre artifice l’on feist le contraire, et que l’on me feist
Auger evokes one of the key classical Greek terms used to define penance:

\[\ldots\] il est mieux à propos de choisir ce changement d’âme, ou d’opinion, et jugement, en se condamnant soi-même, pour le nommer, comme les Grecs, μετάνοια μεταμελέδα ou μετατρέψια pour ses mesfaits et offenses contre Dieu (les Latins ne lui ont encore, dit quelqu’un, mis un nom assez delicat, et nous l’appelons penitence) que pour toute autre choses de nos objects mal assenés. Se repentir donques, à ce compte, et faire penitence (action que nous nommons de vertu) est presque nai\[372\] avec nous, car c’est une act\[509\]ion du Jugement plein de l’intelligence d’avoir failli d’obeir à qui l’on doit (je ne parle maintenant du Sacrement) si, que et l’entendement, et la volonté s’accordent ensemble : assistés de la mémoire du passé, pour produire ce desplaisir, regret, et mescontement de n’avoir pas bien servi le maistre : promesse de mieux.\[44]\n
As the philosopher Pierre Hadot explains *metanoia* (μετάνοια), which literally translates as “change of mind,” implies a complete spiritual transformation of the heart of the sinner: “*metanoia* […] signifie un ‘changement de pensée,’ ‘un repentir’ et implique l’idée d’une mutation et d’une renaissance.”\[45\]

Following the Pauline doctrine according to which one must

\[\ldots\] signifie un ‘changement de pensée,’ ‘un repentir’ et implique l’idée d’une mutation et d’une renaissance.”\[45\]


45 Pierre Hadot’s explanation of the term *conversio* is useful here to understanding the nuances of the word *metanoia* compared to *epistrophè*: “Selon sa signification étymologique, conversion (du latin, *conversio*) signifie ‘retournement,’ ‘changement de direction.’ Le mot sert donc à désigner toute espèce de retournement ou de transposition. C’est ainsi qu’en logique le mot est employé pour désigner l’opération par laquelle on inverse les termes d’une proposition. […] Le mot latin *conversio* correspond en fait à deux mots grecs de sens différents, d’une part *epistrophè* qui signifie ‘changement d’orientation,’ et implique l’idée d’un retour (retour à l’origine, retour à soi), d’autre part, *metanoia* qui signifie ‘changement de pensée,’ ‘repentir,’ et implique l’idée d’une mutation et d’une renaissance. Cette polarité fidélité-rupture a fortement marqué la conscience occidentale depuis l’apparition du christianisme.” *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2002, 223)
“despouiller le vieil homme, pour se parer d’un nouveau,” Auger places penance at the heart of a discourse on interior transformation. Such a life-changing, one-time conversion could only be a very rare occurrence:

[…], et de fait le changement si soudain, et tel que nous admirons en lui renversé par terre d’un esclair de ceste lumiere celeste, et contraint à ploier et faire joug à ceste force divine qui lui serroit les esperons de si pres, n’est qu’un tour d’en haut, extra-ordinaire, et privilege non accoustumé […].

Because of the “extraordinary” and exceptional character of this kind of conversion, Auger recommends instead a “revue ordinaire” of the soul: “aussi ne scuroit-on se rendre parfait en bonté, se despouillant de toutes affections vitieuses d’une traicte, et en une heure, doctrine peinte en la guarison faicte petite à petite de l’aveugle par nostre grand Medecin […].” Since sinners were rarely able to change abruptly and radically, and were more likely to improve by degrees, it was essential to confess and go to Communion more often. The individual must examine “tous les soirs sa conscience, devant que de se jetter au repos de son corps et raison à son ame curieusement [soigneusement], de toutes ses pensées, paroles, et actions, du jour écoulé, tant bonnes que mauvaises […].” For Auger, there were no circumstances in which the soul was more adaptable and easy to fashion than when the sinner was “à deux genoux, les mains jointes, la larme à l’œil, le souspir en la poitrine, le regret au cœur, la parole humble à la

46 Auger, Metanoeologie, 39.

47 Ibid., 69.

48 Ibid., 197.

49 Ibid., 69.

50 Ibid., 191-2.
bouche [...].”51 Before retiring, the sinner must read into the book of his or her heart (”ce petit livre de ton coeur”52) and purge the “wickedness” therein:

[…] ge henne-toi toi-mesmes, puni-toi, racle ta malice, en te de chir ant de regrets comme de havets, condamne-toi, mets-toi devant les yeux le gibet d’enfer, et ne t’espargnes aucunement, à fin que tu es chapes le redoutable jugement […] si ta conscience te veut eschapper, se fain dre, dissimuler, s’excuser, empoigne-la, force-la, dit-lui que tu es son juge ordinaire, que c’est à toi de scavor ce qu’on fait chez toi, et qu’il n’y a nul danger d’estre diffamée puisque c’est devant Dieu, en secret, sans tesmoin, pour rendre le devoir apres où il faut […]53

This regular and implacable scrutiny of the soul was untraditional for the period.54 Four occasions commonly designated the moment when Catholics performed the Sacrament of penance: during the period of Christmas and Lent, before receiving any other sacrament (except Baptism), before performing a solemn religious act such as mass, and on their deathbed, accompanied by the Extreme Unction.55 If penance was an interior and private process of contrition and amendment, it was not understood—contrary to the practices advocated by Auger—as a religious ritual to be performed daily, weekly, or even monthly. Although confession was more frequent than communion, it was not, as Thomas Tentler rightly points out, generally “conceived as a repetitive individual routine except among monks or unusually pious

51 Ibid., 200.
52 Ibid., 193.
53 Ibid., 194.
55 Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation, 73.
laymen. Rather, it was normally tied to crises: to dangerous journeys, marriage, childbirth, serious illness, the possible absence of a priest-confessor, and to the feasts of All Saints, Christmas, Pentecost, and, above all to Lent and Easter.\textsuperscript{56} In order to preserve the integrity of the Sacrament of penance, many theologians believed that, aside from these particular moments in the liturgical calendar year and certain types of extraordinary circumstances, penance should remain a limited practice. For many, performing it too frequently, making it a habitual action, threatened its very sacrality.\textsuperscript{57} Those who wanted repeated and scrupulous confession stood out and had to be approached with prudence by their confessors who would either encourage them in their spiritual path, or help pull them back, should their devotion become self-indulgent or lead them to despair.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{"Que vont faire si souvent à confesse nos voisins!"}\textsuperscript{59} Auger responded to criticisms such as this one, directed against the king’s congregation, by underscoring what he saw as the many advantages conferred to the sinner by frequent confession and participation in the Holy Communion:

\begin{quote}
L’Autre exercice plein de devotion, aisé, et fructueux à tous les Confreres, c’est l’usage ordinaire de la Confession, et puis de la divine Communion: et pour le regard de la
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 75.

\textsuperscript{58} See chapter three of Tentler’s \textit{Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation} for more information on some of the nuances held by medieval theologians concerning the question of frequent and infrequent confession. Some theologians in fact recommended more regular attendance to confession, particularly those who sought a more extreme version of penance as a result of a growing laxity in laymen. Interestingly, Auger’s recommendation to repent more regularly can also be understood within a larger shift that occurred during the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, in which confessing more regularly began to gain ground amongst theologians.

\textsuperscript{59} Auger, \textit{Métanoeologie}, 201.
Confessing to a priest monthly or even biweekly, he argued, not only alleviated the individual’s guilt and doubts about his capacity to confess and address his sins, but also allowed him to better habituate himself to the rigorous sweetness of penance (“nous nous apprivoisons à sa rigoureuse douceur”). Scrutinizing one’s soul in prayer and self-admonishment before retiring, as well as confessing to a priest once or twice a month was a way of controlling the passions.

This attention to the self, as described and promoted by Auger, shows a striking parallel between the king’s politics of repentance and monastic forms of spirituality. The “revue ordinaire de l’âme” proposed in Métanoeologie resembles the disciplining mechanisms used by the very monastic orders and confraternities the king so admired. Just as monks embraced ascetic disciplinary practices and followed the monastic Rule (kanon) of their order, the penitents of the king’s congregation adopted austere techniques that were designed to help them regularly monitor their souls. Different from a sudden conversion or an obligatory repentance (i.e. confession during Lent), their penance, just as a monk’s, was based on a habitual inspection of

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60 Auger, Métanoeologie, 198. Penance was closely associated with Holy Communion because it was almost always performed before partaking in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: “[…] voire mais dira quelqu’un, Il faut si grand appareil devant que d’entrer à ceste table l’ame doit estre si nette, et le corps orné de tel, et si paré accostrement, sur peine d’estre chassé honteusement du banquet, et rigoureusement puni, que le meilleur est de ne s’en approcher que peu souvent, pour avoir du loisir de se parer, et embellir d’avantage. Response [d’Auger] en un mot, ce que pieça rejetta sur le visage de semblables desgoustés, un tressage Pasteur, Que ce n’est point au tems qu’il se faut rapporter pour este digne de ceste viande, car qui n’est aujourd’hui prest d’en taster, à peine le sera il demain, et que le delai de s’en accoster, en fait reculer d’avantage, ains qu’un parfaict moien de s’en rendre jouissant avec fruict, c’est d’en user, et le prendre souvent, n’estant le manger qu’on fait un dimanche, qu’une juste et reiglée disposition pour en faire tout autant l’autre.” (Ibid., 204).
the soul. By paying regular attention to their sins through the exercise of a self-reflective repentance, they could “train” themselves, so to speak, to avoid future transgressions. By becoming a series of techniques of self-regulation to be actuated daily, repentance could be developed into a kind of habitus bound to transform the sinner’s soul. One could argue it resembled the notion of prosoché, an exercise in self-fashioning used in Antiquity, which as Pierre Hadot shows, was taken up by monastic orders as a way of bringing the believer closer to God:

Cette vigilance continuelle sur les pensées et les intentions se retrouve dans la spiritualité monastique. Ce sera la “garde du cœur,” la nepsis ou vigilance. Il ne s’agit pas là seulement d’un exercice moral: la prosoché replace l’homme dans son être véritable, c’est-à-dire dans sa relation à Dieu. Elle équivaut à un exercice continu de la présence de Dieu.61

But if repentance can be linked to a form of attention to the self, it has a specificity that sets it apart from most forms of prosoché. Culpability, remorse, and contrition are at the heart of the “revue ordinaire de l’âme” recommended in Metanoeologie, which was not necessarily the case with the spiritual exercises practiced in antiquity (for instance, overcoming the fear of death and sickness in order to better enjoy and live out one’s life was the goal of the Epicurean care of the self, as Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault have shown).62 Even if the goal of repentance was the improvement and purification of the individual’s soul, it was also a constant reminder of the individual’s failures. Remorse and guilt were at the center of this practice, which strove to amplify these emotions and stimulate the reminiscence of faults in order to bring about personal change.


If practicing these penitential exercises was for the members of the congregation a way of regulating their life, they were not living in cells: such transfers into a wider public of elements taken from monastic life had clear implications. Indeed, in Auger’s eyes, this self-vigilance was actually more than a monk’s technique of introspection or a fine-tuned examination of the soul; it was a way of transforming repentance into a way of life in the city. His call for regularly reflecting upon one’s errors in order to break down the barriers between the sinner and God was symptomatic of changes in Henri III’s politics. Although, at first glance, the new philosophy of repentance appeared to be centered on the individual, it also strove to inscribe itself into the collective, to become a social practice. The tireless examination of the soul and exercises of self-condemnation had not merely as their focus the inner world of the penitent: they were also tools that would allow the monarch’s “école de penitence” to be more thoroughly integrated into the community and become politicized. The gradual institutionalization and expansion of monastic orders and confraternities privileging repentance could be read as one of the first signs that the scope of penitence was widening. Supported by Henri III, these institutions and societies acted as a kind of experimental zone for the transfer of penitence from private, intimate practices to the political sphere. However, the diffusion of this concept entailed more than the mere implementation of new religious orders and confraternities and the reactivation of old ones. In order to direct the public’s gaze towards “righteousness,” with the aim of changing the souls of both his subjects and his adversaries, Henri III would have to make use of other methods of persuasion and techniques of conversion. If penance were to influence the body politic and take effect as a kind of social practice, leading people to amend their lives and change, it would have to catch the public’s eye—to become visible, spectacular.
The Spectacle of Mortification

If there was one spiritual exercise linked to penance that was typical of the monastic orders promoted by Henri III, it was mortification. Ascetic discipline was supposed to strengthen the will and to help overcome the desire to sin. What gave true life to the penitent was indeed a painful death of the body:

_Souhait du vrai Penitens_

Le sac, la croix, les pleurs, le foûet, de ce livre,
Sont l’aire, le cœur, le sens, l’ame qui le fait vivre.
O vie de ce livre, helas, fai moï mourir!
A ceste mort pour vivre, ô Dieu, fai moi courir,
Vif, m'enterrere en moi, et, dans ma conscience,
Me veoir vivre, et mourir, en faisant penitence.  

As this epigraph from _Metanoeologie_ shows, the habit, the cross, tears, and the whip were the means by which the members of the _Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame_ sought to repudiate the carnal world. Only by fully and violently rejecting the temporal through strict asceticism and forms of corporal punishment could they purify their consciences and attain a deeper communion with God.

By no means entirely new to France during this period, mortification had been integrated into a few religious societies in the South, in cities such as Toulouse, Avignon, Lyon, and Marseille. The king himself had participated in such penitential processions when he had briefly stayed in Avignon after his flight from Poland at the beginning of his reign in 1574:

Le Roy, estant en Avignon, s’addona bien fort aux devotions et à ces compagnies de penitens; et alloient de nuict par les rues, luy et Monsieur le cardinal de Lorraine, avecq grande suitte de penitens, avecq des flambeaux ardens et vestuz de sacs de toille blanche. Et combien qu’il ne face pas si grands froids en ces pays-là, toutefois c’estoit au mois de decembre où il ne laisse pas de faire froid, et tire des vents si impetueux que l’on diroit

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63 Auger, _Metanoeologie_, 1.
quasi qu’ilz veulent emporter les maisons, et n’oseroit on se trouver parmy les rues.\textsuperscript{64}

If Henri III had decided to show his devotion by partaking in these austere processions, such examples of ascetic forms of repentance were in fact rare—if not unheard of—in Paris. As we have already seen, the surge in penitential devotion that had marked the year 1583 in the cities of Northern France was related to exceptional circumstances: the degradation of the state, war, famine, and disease had led Northerners, who were panicked and terror-stricken, to engage in extraordinary acts of devotion in order to appease divine wrath. But such \textit{processions blanches} did not involve exceedingly austere devotional practices, and while some penitents walked barefoot or fasted, corporal asceticism in fact remained at their periphery. This set them in strong contrast with the orders and confraternities that the king supported from 1583 onwards, which prioritized devotional acts and representations dramatizing mortification and the negation of the body. The \textit{ sac du pénitent} became the most conspicuous sign of this self-abnegation. Catholic religious orders had, to be sure, long embraced specific wardrobes in order to differentiate themselves from the secular and clerical world. But more than a symbol allowing the spectator to identify the king’s confraternity, the habit was here meant to remind everyone that penance was at the center of its beliefs:

L’habit est en forme de sac allant jusques sur les pieds, assez large avec deux manches, non trop justes, et un capuchon cousu sur la couture du collet par le derriere assez pointu par en haut, et par devant allant en pointe jusques à demy pied au dessous de la ceinture, n’y ayant que deux trous pour regarder à l’endroit des yeux, et non autres ouvertures, ny aussi audit sac que deux boutons devant, estant tout le reste jusques à bas cousu sans aucune ouverture, le tout d’assez grosse toile de Holande, blanche, lequel sera ceint d’une cordeliere avec plusieurs neuds, pendante jusques au dessous des genoux pour le moins, et est de filet blanc, et ne pourront tous lesdits habits estre d’autre estoffe que la susdite

\footnote{Gassot, \textit{Sommaire-Mémorial}, 134-135. See L’Estoile, \textit{Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III}, t. I, 97. Some historians, notably J. Boucher and P. Chevallier, have also interpreted this moment as Henri III’s first spiritual crisis, in which he took refuge in penance because of his grief over the death of the princess of Condé, Marie de Clèves, with whom he was passionately in love.}

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nommee en cest article, lesquels ils tiendront le plus proprement qu’ils pourront, et auront
tant ceux de la seconde et estroicte reigle que ceux de la premiere reigle sur le devant,
quasi au hault de l’espaule gauche, sur un fonds de veloux tanné-cannelé, qui sera quasi
tout rond, une croix de taffetats blanc dessus, avec arriere-point de soye blanche. 65

The habit chosen by Henri III for his congregation was perceived as highly unusual and elicited
numerous debates in Paris, which need to be replaced within the larger context of the *renovatio
monastica* that flourished during the Counter-Reformation. Many religious orders that developed
in Italy and France—such as the Minims, Capuchins, Jesuits, and the Feuillants—sought to
reform their models of devotion by finding inspiration in a stricter application of their original
Rule. 66 Although numerous criticisms were addressed against the monks and their orders
regarding the habits they had chosen, (particularly, earlier in the period, by humanists such as
Erasmus or Rabelais who deemed them ostentatious or hypocritical), they were meant to reflect
the “*qualités du fors intérieur,*” as Benoist Pierre remarked. 67 Made up of a “*multitude de signes
identitaires parfaitement codifiés,*” 68 the monk’s habit was in fact one of the central features of
the debates that took place during the *renovatio monastica*. More than a simple sign of piety, it
was an object that represented spiritual reformation, and any change brought to it reflected high
ideological stakes: “*à chaque fois qu’on tenta de réformer un ordre ancien, une querelle d’habits*

65 [Edmond Auger], *Les Statuts de la Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Nostre Dame, par le
commandement et privilège du Roy*, (Paris: J. Mettayer, 1983), 27. See also Pierre Victor Palma Cayet,
*Chronologie novenaire*, 31.

66 The Feuillants were a reformed Cistercian order based on the teachings of Bernard de Clarivaux. The original
congregation began near Toulouse at Labastide-Clermont in 1577 under the direction of Jean de La Barrière. See
notes 36 and 37.

67 Benoist Pierre, “L’habit faisait-il le moine? Le paraître des religieux au temps de la réforme catholique (France,
Italie),” in Isabelle Paresys, *Paraître et apparences dans l’histoire en Europe occidentale du Moyen Âge à nos jours,

One of the major measures taken by Mathieu de Basci, the future reformer and founder of the Capuchins, was thus to restore St. Francis of Assisi’s original dress code, which he saw as “le plus proche des origines, celui qui symbolisait le mieux la vérité du message évangélique et des origines chrétiennes.” The Feuillants were similarly preoccupied with rehabilitating “l’esprit originel des premiers temps,” and it was through their habit that they sought to represent the religious purity they strove to attain. Wearing a simple “robe de toile blanche” and—cinching their waist—a cord symbolizing the three vows of purity, poverty, and austerity, the Feuillants considered their exterior appearance as representative of their interior state. During the sixteenth century, a new dimension was added to the signification of the monk’s dress. As Benoist Pierre, again, notes, the habit became an object of mortification that was used to better convey the intensity of the clergy’s faith: “l’habit comme objet de mortification, porté ostensiblement par les clercs comme pour mieux qualifier leur état et affirmer l’intensité de leur foi.” Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Society of Jesus in 1540, believed that it was necessary for monks to seek in their habit “une aide pour la mortification et l’abnégation d’eux-mêmes, et à fouler aux pieds le monde et ses vanités.” What the monk wore

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69 Ibid., 158.

70 Ibid., 153.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 160.

represented, at least ideally, “des vertus mortifian
tes utiles à la soumission du corps et à la
libération de l’âme.” The Capuchins also came to see the habit in a similar manner. Attempting
to model their lives after the austerity of St John the Baptist, they were ordered to seek the
poorest fabrics from which to cut their clothes: “Il a esté ordonné que les freres qui ont choisi de
vivre mesprisés en la maison de Dieu, se vestent des plus vils, des plus austères, des plus gros et
pauvres draps, qu’ils pourront commodément avoir dans les provinces où ils se trouveront.”
The Feuillant, like the Capuchin, wore a “ceinture” made of rough rope, which was supposed to
be “grosse et vile avec des nœuds très simple, sans aucune curiosité, ou singularité.” A symbol
of their contempt for the world, these cords represented another way in which they could mortify
themselves further.

As in these earlier examples, the “sac du pénitent” of the king’s congregation bore a
strong ideological and symbolic dimension. It was firstly a rejection of the temporal world: “cest
habillement de Penitent si mince, et de si petit pris, ne sert-il pas d’un leger essai, pour à bon
escient un jour quitter tout le precieux qui est dessous, et entrer en lice d’un vrai mespris du
monde, des voluptés, de la mort, et de soi-mesmes?” A repudiation of death as much as of
bodily and earthly pleasures, it served as a symbol of austerity, humility, and self-punishment.
Just as clerics had had to defend their choices during the quarrels that had emerged over the
modifications of the religious dress of the Minims, Capuchins, and Feuillants, Auger was forced


75 Les Constitutions des FF. Mineurs Capucins de S. François. Approuvés et confirmées par nostre S.P. le pape
Urbain VIII, (Paris: Chez Denys Thierry) 1645, 27.

76 Ibid., 30.

77 Auger, Metanoeologie, 163.
to defend the legitimacy of the habit adopted by the king’s *Congrégation des Pénitents de l'Annocation de Notre-Dame*. Described as being “nouveau” in a decidedly negative sense, the habit disquieted many Parisians, in great part because the hood fully covering the faces of the penitents signaled that extreme mortification was a central value in the order.\(^7\) Seeking to refute the “malicious talk” generated around the habit, Auger thus advanced a series of arguments to counter negative perceptions of mortification. He first asserted that rather than being new, its design was grounded in long-established customs:

> [...] nostre sac, n’est ni d’estoffe, ni de forme tellement nouveau, que les anciens serviteurs de Dieu n’en aient en l’usage, en toutes les nations, presque, qui ont admiré la force de Penitence, et le credit qu’elle a envers luy, et c’est aussi pourqoy, cest accoustrement en toutes langues, s’appelle, sac, il est vrai, que qui le vouloit avoir plus aspre, et rioteux à son corps, il le faisoit tissir et coudre de poil de beste, comme de chameau, de chevre, de cheval, ou autre semblable qui fust rude, et l’appeloit on alors Cilice ou haire, mesmes quand on le mettoit sur la chaire toute nue […]\(^\)\(^7\)\(9\)

After affirming that the use of a “sac” was indeed based on a respected and longstanding practice, Auger defended its austere and harsh character: hadn’t it been common for some penitents to make their sackcloth even more painful to wear by having it cut of harsh materials that turned it into a cilice? Here the Jesuit’s aim seemed to not only convince his readers of the prevalence of mortification throughout the ages, but also to persuade them of its deeply connected relationship to the habit itself: the sackcloth was originally more than a sign of one’s faith and devotion to God, it was also, from the start, an act of mortification, a sign of one’s

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penance and submission before God. The king’s congregation saw it in fact as a symbolic reenactment of the sufferings of Christ:

Mais quant à cest habit il est au reste si agreable au fils de Dieu, que sa robbe longue non cousue, toute entiere, garentie de la rapine des bourreaux, en estoit, dit quelqu’un comme un modelle, et que ces sacs representent, qui n’est pas un mauvais rencontre, et pour le moins quand Herode le feit revestir de une robbe blanche pour se moquer de lui, comme d’un fol, et se gaudir de son Roi, nous portons volontiers ceste livrée, comme ceux qui n’ont aultre espoir en ce monde, qu’en la folie de la Croix, pour l’amour de laquelle nous voulons bien que le monde nous mesprise […].\textsuperscript{80}

Because the king’s penitents, following the tradition of the \textit{imitatio Christi}, wanted to mirror Christ’s sufferings, they adopted a white robe as a reminder of the one Jesus, derided by Herod, had been forced to wear, as well as the cords of the Passion, which represented “\textit{les liens, desquels on sçait que les bourreaux garroterent Jesus tout au commencement de sa passion […]}.\textsuperscript{81}” Similarly, the flagellums that hung off their belts were there to remind the viewers not only of the whips that Pilate’s soldiers had used on Jesus, but also of the fact that such tools had been used by the church fathers and Saint Paul to mortify the flesh (the reference to Hebrews 12 in the following passage is in fact erroneously attributed here to Saint Paul):

Quant au foüet (oultre la memoire que j’ai dit qu’il engendre en vous des escourgées, et foüets dont Jesus fut affligé) qu’on porte à la ceinture, ce n’est instrument d’affliction, par nous inventé, car soit de cela, ou des verges, ou de plus aspres escourgées, les anciens peres ennemis de leur chair, s’en sont servis gaillardement contre eux mesmes, voire S. Paul ainsi que j’ai dit ailleurs […].\textsuperscript{82}

Although, in \textit{Metanoeologie}, Christ predictably appears as the ultimate model of mortification and self-sacrifice, Auger also conjures, with perceptible relish, the long tradition of martyred

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, 171.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, 175. “Et quoi donc? ne faut-il pas que nous essaions une fois l’aigreur de ces battures que le fils de Dieu souffrit en sa chair si paisiblement, pour l’amour de nous?” (\textit{Ibid.}, 178-179)

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid.}, 176.
saints:

[… en nos sainctes histoire, la où, voire les martirs, au milieu des feux, des glaives, des roues, des Lyons, des Carnages, et de toutes sortes de tourmens, ce mocquent des bourreaux, et en brocardant ceux qui les tenaillent, tronsonnent, rostissent, et fricassent chantent les cantiques à Dieu buffetant la mort même, et la combattant vaillament comme corps à corps, en camp clos, ce qui ne se pouvoit point faire sans un grand appareil de vertus faits par eux au paravant en l’Eschole, de toute mortification, et penitence, qui n’est, comme à bien dit un d’eux, rompu en semblables matières, que comme un apprentissage de ce beau roolle que l’on joue par après sur ce triomphant Theatre du Martire.83

Already having been schooled in penance and mortification, the martyred saints were better able to face the torments that awaited them: “pour avoir jeusné, s’estre affligé, fouetté, macéré sa chair, porté le sac, la haire, pleuré, gemi, couché sur la dure, demeuré aux deserts, bref, mesprisé le monde et soi-même,” they were able to strengthen their faith and maintain the temporal world in contempt even when subjected to the most barbaric treatments. For the king’s congregation, as Auger makes it clear, it was in the strict discipline of the body that the true practice of penance could be initiated. The example of Christ, who had endured the torments of the cross, reminded the feeble sinner that he had not resisted “to the point of shedding blood” nor truly endured God’s rod of discipline (Hebrews 12). Auger claimed that those who never scourged themselves understood none of its spiritual benefits: “[ils] n’entendent point, que quant la chaire se sent ainsi brusquement estriller, et poindre, l’esprit soudain se range à compunction, à larmes, à gemissements, à souspirs, à regrets, et à un crier de merci à Dieu trespitoyable […].”84 The rod was thus clearly a tool for spiritual awakening: “nous avons tous besoing d’estre parfois réveillés par quelque coup de verge, ou telle, ou semblable, cinglée sur

83 Ibid., 98.

84 Ibid., 177.
Flagellation, which was arguably the most striking form of mortification, was not absent from the king’s own penitential processions:

Le Jeudi Saint VIIIème [avril], sur les neuf heures du soir, la procession des Penitents, où le Roy estoit avec tous ses mignons, alla toute la nuit par les rues et aux églises, en grande magnificence de luminaire et musique excellente, faux-bourdonnée. Et y en eust quelques-uns (mesmes des mignons, à ce qu’on disoit), qui se fouetterent en cette procession, ausquels on voioit le pauvre dos tout rouge des coups qu’ils se donnoient.  

In a spectacular procession such as this one, performed at night with illuminations and fauxbourdon music, these acts would have caught the eyes of many Parisians, as they clearly went against the norm. Although most clergy tolerated moderate forms of mortification, flagellation remained controversial. Even Auger, who clearly supported it, believed that it should only be practiced within the walls of the penitent’s cell, far from the public’s eye, and might have disapproved of this particular display of bloodied backs. In his praise of the king’s congregation, Christophe de Penfeunteniou Cheffontaine, a former Franciscan who had become the archbishop of Lyon, also claimed that flagellation should be viewed as a perfectly legitimate practice, as long as it remained inconspicuous:

En ladite Apologie nous disons estre licite se fouëter soy-mesme moyennant que ce soit discrètement, et ne pensans du venerate Docteur Gerson, qu’il entende n’estre point simplement licite à un homme se discipliner et flageller, pour quelque cause que ce soit. Mais seulement quand il se flagelle ou avec exces, ou pensant estre necessaire à son salut l’effusion de son propre sang. Car pour sentir plus en soy les peines que nostre Redempteur a pour nous enduré le jour de sa passion, et pour chastier la chair rebelle et mutine à l’esprit, et pour faire penitence et se punir de ses pechez, soustenons estre licite se flageller et discipliner.

85 Ibid., 177.


87 Cheffontaine, Apologie de la confrérie des pénitents, 34-35.
However, in an apparent contradiction, Cheffontaine also claimed that more than just a means of enacting self-punishment and nurturing the soul, flagellation was something that “[…] esmouvoit les regardans à devotions et compunction de leurs cœurs”—it could move others to piety.  

Seeking to justify flagellation by anchoring it in the origins of Christianity, Cheffontaine wrote that it should remain inconspicuous, while arguing that it needed some degree of visibility in the city in order to be socially effective.

Such ambivalence is indeed telling. Functioning as a declaration of penance, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ and the mortification of the flesh for the edification of the soul, the habit worn by penitents throughout the streets of Paris represented more than the mere return to the Rule of a religious order. In despite of its “ideological” repudiation of the flesh, it paradoxically brought the body of the sinner to the very forefront of politics. Flagellation, fasting, wearing the cilice, when done in the open, dramatized penance, turning the penitents into edifying tableaux vivants: “Et pourquoi ne sera-ce, comme un tableau peint au vif, de toute mortification, et pour les spectateurs, et pour les Penitens, quand ils se montreront ainsi accoustrés?”  

The unconventional practice of representing penance in such a spectacular way disturbed many Parisians. Not only did it run contrary to the heretofore more restrained penitential practices of the royal court, it also represented for some a corruption of the monastic forms of penance, something Auger and Cheffontaine, through their hesitations, underhandedly acknowledged. Normally restricted to the confines of the monk’s cell within the private space of the cloister, and understood as a discreet and personal relationship between the monk and God, mortification was

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88 Ibid., 35.

89 Auger, Metaneologie, 163.
now being publically staged throughout the streets of Paris as an active and dynamic theological-political spectacle.

More than anything, what rendered Henri III’s penitential ceremonies so different from others—and to some truly unsettling—was the fact that the king and his court, not monks, were publicly embracing monastic exercises. The sackcloth shocked many Parisians not only because it publicized penitence in a way rarely or never seen before, but also because individuals at the highest level of political power had chosen to adopt a monastic attire in the open. Only religious men attempting to lead a ermetic or anchoritic lifestyle wore such garments, not dukes, cardinals, noblemen, magistrates, or other important seigneurs—and least of all the king himself. With its new appropriation by elite society, the habit had lost some of its sacrality. The flagrant difference between the lifestyle of monks and courtiers was what generated this devaluation: wasn’t the royal court the symbolic space par excellence of the worldly and the political? How could ambitious courtiers, looking for favor, flattering and humoring the king in order to receive advantages and wealth, truly embody the ideals associated with the penitential habit, which was almost antithetical to their richly adorned dress? The everyday bustle of the royal court—where “mignons” and nobles vied to further their own personal agendas—couldn’t have been more at odds with the lifestyle associated with the penitential devotion the king sought to promote, and many of his contemporaries indeed noticed this glaring contradiction. Maurice Poncet—a monk who had been briefly imprisoned by the king as a punishment for the bold accusations he had made against the Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre Dame—attacked these noblemen in sermons, claiming that they were “hipocrates et atheistes.” He underscored the

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90 Three fourths of the 444 confreres identified in the Congrégation des pénitents blancs de l’Annonciation Notre-Dame were nobles of the Sword (nobles d’épée) or members of the royal court’s clergy. See Jacqueline Boucher, Société et mentalités autour de Henri III, (Paris: H. Champion, 2007), 1049.
“penitent’s” inability to renounce certain lavish courtly customs, pointing out that they were in direct opposition with the penitential lifestyle they pretended to embrace. Indeed, far from being ascetic monks, they could not refrain from indulging in rich foods: “J’ay esté adverti de bon lieu, qu’hier au soir (qui estoit le vendredi de leur procession), la broche tournoit pour le soupper de ces bons penitens, et qu’apres avoir mangé le gras chappon, ils eurent pour leur collation de nuit le petit tendron qu’on leur tenoit prest. Ah! Malheureux hipocrates, vous vous mocquez donc de Dieu sous le masque, et portez pour contenance un fouet à vostre ceinture.” If the king’s congregation departed from the norm, provoking criticisms such as this one, it was thus partly because elites were perceived as superficially and strategically embracing the lifestyle of ascetic monks, an act that smacked of irreverence and hypocrisy. For some, monastic customs were being corrupted by their unorthodox appropriation by the king’s congregation and the royal court.

This disruption of traditional monastic penance had a number of long-lasting consequences. Its unsettling theological-political incorporation into the very heart of the state de facto led to a reappraisal of the concept itself and of the practices associated with it. No longer was it evident who, for instance, was socially entitled to practice mortification, since the king’s congregation had appropriated what until then had been mostly viewed as a way for monks to liberate the spirit from the tyranny of the flesh. Nor was it quite clear how it should be done or where it should take place, since it had left the confines of the Church and had entered the public sphere in a new and unconventional way. The king’s penitential processions were no doubt reshaping the social and political dynamics surrounding the concept.

Paramount to the success of the “school of repentance” promoted by the king and his entourage was not only the direct reception of their processions by the public, but the ways in which they were relayed and portrayed in texts and images. Henri III’s penitential persona, because it was unusual and criticized by many, needed to be validated by inserting it in a complex network of signs that served to reinforce its legitimacy. An anonymous set of sketches depicting various processions—first extensively studied by Frances Yates—provides a striking insight into how those who organized such events hoped they would be perceived. The Bible, naturally, was the privileged lens through which one was to represent and read Henri III’s theological-political spectacles, and the sketches are fraught with allusions to biblical figures, most of them associated with penitence and the kind of austere mortification that the king supported. In one of the drawings (see figure 8), we can thus see St. Jerome, famous for his asceticism and penance, partaking in a procession: walking behind the knights from the order of

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92 These sketches—entitled the Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans: avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier—are incorrectly dated: the presence of Henri III’s Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame in them (sketches 14 and 15), which was founded in 1583, suggests that they were more likely to have been drawn near or after 1583. This is also the opinion of Jean-Pierre Babelon: “L’état du chantier du Pont Neuf que l’on aperçoit distinctement, et la création des Pénitents de l’Annonciation en mars 1583 invitent à situer l’exécution de ces dessins en 1583-1584.” (Une nouvelle histoire de Paris. Paris au XVIe siècle, Paris: Association pour la publication d’une histoire de Paris, Hachette, 1986, appendix). For a study of these sketches, see also: Frances Yates, Astraea: the imperial theme in the 16th century (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); Frances Yates, “Dramatic religious processions in Paris in the late sixteenth century,” in Annales musicologiques: Moyen-Age et Renaissance, (Paris: Société de musique d’autrefois, 1954), t. II; See also another important set of sketches on processions by Nicolas Houël, called the “Procession de la reine” (Un philanthrope au XVIe siècle: Nicolas Houel, fondateur de la Maison de la charité chrétienne, ed. Alexandre de Laborde, Mâcon: Impr. Protat frères; Paris: A. Barry, Société des Bibliophiles français, 1937). This procession is not penitential in nature, but is focused on works of charity. For a more detailed study of this procession, see the aforementioned texts by Francis Yates, as well as Susan Broomhall’s article “Hearts on Fire: Compassion and Love in Nicolos Houël’s Traité de la charité chrétienne” (Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100-1800, ed. Susan Broomhall, Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill cop., 2015).
the St. Esprit, the patron saint and his followers are holding stones in remembrance of the moment he prayed, fasted, and beat his chest with such a stone, in the desert, to still his sexual desires. (This group of penitents is probably an illustration of the Confrérie des Pénitents Bleus de Saint Jérôme, or the “Hiéronymites,” which, as we have already seen, were closely associated with the king’s processions.) Walking alongside the Seine river, with the Palais de Justice and its garden in the background, are also Mary Madeleine, holding an alabaster pot of ointment, and St Mary of Egypt (see figure 9), the patron saint of penitents, recognizable by her long hair and the three loaves she is carrying. They are followed by members of the order of Augustines, the Filles pénitentes. Several of the other sketches (see figures 10, 11 & 12) depict the Minims, the Capuchins, and even possibly the Feuillants: as we have already seen, each of these orders adopted an austere penitential lifestyle and was included in the king’s promotion of a penitential model.

At the center of this complex network of signs repeating and multiplying the message of repentance through biblical symbolism is the king. While the penitents King David and St John the Baptist were often invoked as prestigious models with which Henri III could be associated, the sketches make interesting use here of another biblical character—the king of Nineveh. In the right foreground of one of the images (see figure 12), Henri III and the queen, Louise de

93 In other depictions of the Pénitents bleus, they have also been illustrated as wearing fully hooded sackcloths similar to the king’s (see figure 10).

94 For a clarification on the different biblical Maries and hagiographical legends of her, often confused during the Middle Ages, see Élizabeth Pinto-Mathieu, Marie-Madeleine dans la littérature du Moyen Âge, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997).

95 For an excellent study on the representation of penitent women and their orders during this period, see Barbara Diefendorf’s From penitence to charity: pious women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2004).
Lorraine-Vaudémont, both wearing a crown and a sackcloth partially covering their heads, stand on each side of Jonah, who is rendered easily identifiable by the ship he holds above his head and the whale wrapped around it. In the background, another whale can be seen, off in the distance.\(^9^6\) The prophet’s story, well known during the period, is told in the Book of Jonah 3:5 and in Mathews 12:40. Ordered to go to the great city of Nineveh and to warn its inhabitants of impending doom and of the necessity to repent and change their wicked ways, Jonah—disobeying God—instead sails to Joppa (Jaffha). Soon cast overboard and swallowed up by the great fish, the prophet prays for three days and three nights, asking for forgiveness. Finally freed from his living prison, he then goes to the city of Nineveh, long corrupted by pomp and luxury. There, as divinely instructed, he tells its inhabitants of God’s plan to destroy the city in forty nights’ time and bids them to repent and beg for mercy. The people of Nineveh believe Jonah: a fast is proclaimed and they pull sackcloths over their heads as a sign of penance. The king of Nineveh himself descends from his throne, takes off his royal robes, covers himself with a sackcloth, and kneels down on ashes to pray to God in humility and repentance, hoping to turn His wrath into compassion so that his people will not perish (see figure 13).

The representation of the ship and the whale we find in the sketches was most likely symbolically transparent to the beholder, especially since the figure of the king of Nineveh appeared in other evocations of the king’s confraternity. We, for example, find a clear mention of the story of Jonas in the context of an encomium written on Henri III’s congregation by Christophe de Cheffontaine, the *Apologie de la confrarie des pénitents, érigée et instituée en la*

\(^9^6\) For Frances Yates, the representation of Henri III as the king of Nineveh, and the presence of a whale, which might also be a dolphin, suggests a possible motive for the penitential scene: “Jonah holds the whale and the ship. The king, and the group behind him, take part in the drama of the story of Jonah and appear as the penitent King of Nineveh and his people. It is extremely unusual that Jonah should hold the whale in this way. It is conceivable that this whale may also be the Dauphin as the result of penitence.” (“Dramatic religious processions in Paris in the late sixteenth century,” 267).
ville de Paris, par le treschrestien roy de France et de Pollogne, Henri III:

Mais une autre parole de nostre Seigneur m’espouvante terriblement, et quasi me persuade que porter le sac pour faire penitence soit presque nécessaire, quand il dit en l’Evangile Math. 12 que les habitans de Ninive resusciteront au dernier jugement pour condamner ceux qui à la predication de l’Evangile ne feront penitence, comme eux la feirent à la predication de Jonas, lesquels tous, depuis le Roy jusques au moindre habitant de la ville, se vestirent de sacs, et jeusnerent quarante jours et s’asseants sur la cendre, reclamoient piteusement la misericorde de Dieu. Nostre Seigneur en son Evangile aprouve, et semble exiger telle penitence soubs terrible menasse."97

Underscoring the importance of carrying out repentance "[…] depuis le Roy jusques au moindre habitant,"98 Cheffontaine places particular emphasis on the eschatological implications of this biblical story and the dangers that will befall the nation if penance is not performed: just as He threatened to destroy the Ninevites, God will exert a similar punishment on France if its inhabitants do not make amends. If the reference to Jonas and the Ninevites, in the sketches, seems to give strength to the king’s politics of repentance by anchoring it in the exemplarity of the Bible and the terror of eschatology, the portrayal of Henri III as the king of Nineveh is also, more subtly, a way to stage the success of repentance—its necessity and effectiveness. Not only did the biblical king listen to Jonas and therefore obey God, but, more importantly, so did his people. In this way, the king of Nineveh is the exact opposite of Nebuchadnezzar, the tyrannical, fallen, and impenitent king to whom Henri III was actually compared by his enemies, and who became so estranged from his people that God’s punishment was to cast him even further outside the society of men by turning him into an animal.99 The story of Jonas and the Ninevites is one of


99 See the Book of Daniel (4:28-33). Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity is, however, restored to him and he recognizes God as sovereign.
redemption through collective and harmonious repentance, and communal reconciliation in God: if Henri III resembles the king of Nineveh, couldn’t it also be because his subjects have become as pious and obedient as the Ninevites? It is interesting to examine the sketches paying close attention to the interaction between the marchers and the public depicted in the background of the procession. In three of the sketches, works of satisfaction are being performed (otherwise known as “good works,” or works of mercy). As the last component of the Sacrament of penance, the works of satisfaction functioned as the repayment of the offender’s debt or penalty (poena) to God after having had one’s guilt (culpa) absolved. Good works assisted the sinner in attaining holiness and aided in sanctification. In the left background of the first sketch (see figure 14), an example of these works is given: food and drinks are being handed out. In the foreground, behind the man holding a banner of the Last Judgment, which alludes to the rewards that will be given to the righteous on Judgment Day, a person is also distributing clothing. Elsewhere in the image, pilgrims are hospitably being welcomed into a home. To the right of the banner bearer, men are carrying food and drinks as good works are being performed by the public. In the second drawing (see figure 15), similar works of charity are being accomplished. In the left foreground, the men partaking in the procession carry pieces of clothing, pilgrims’ staffs, ewers, basins, and towels—all items related to the acts of clothing and feeding the poor—and on the right-hand side they hold phials, alembics, and dried herbs, objects and ingredients that were necessary for healing the sick and making medicines (as Frances Yates points out in her study of the sketches, the sick and wounded being healed compose a scene that could easily be read as a reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).)\(^{100}\) Many other virtuous works are also represented in other episodes of these sketches, such as the burying of

\(^{100}\) Yates, “Dramatic religious processions in Paris in the late sixteenth century,” 265.
the dead or the relieving of prisoners (see figure 16). Our description could go on at length, but what is particularly striking about these representations, what they have in common besides promoting charity and good works, is that they show the immediate effects of the king’s processions. As if by a harmonious, unhindered, and transparent process of exemplarity, the men who are demonstrating good works in the procession are mirrored by the public performing them in the background. Arguably, what we see here is the illustration of a successful performance of the king’s penitential politics: the public, moved by the sight of the penitential procession, enacts the good deeds it promotes. The king’s penitential school—his model of penance—succeeds in its task of converting the public to repentance and convinces them to live a more Christian life.

These representations of the king’s processions seem to seek to superimpose onto the actual processions (as they might have happened) a visual narration reinscribing them within a system of symbols and signs aimed at governing their reception. Much in the way that some Entrées Royales, after or even before they had taken place, were turned into lavishly illustrated livres de fête\(^\text{101}\)—in order to extend their spatial and temporal reach, but also to add to their munificence by emancipating them from the limits of real life—, the king’s processions are here remade out of paper: far from being exact transcriptions of the events (if there ever could be such a thing), they are meant to ensure that their theological-political message is made absolutely clear to the readers and viewers. As Francis Yates rightly notes, the referentiality of the sketches is at best uncertain: “The backgrounds suggest pilgrimages going long distances from the real Paris out into the country, but their topography is partly a dream topography. No royal pilgrimage on foot from Paris ever reached the coast, and in any case the sea of the last scene is

not the Channel but Jonah’s sea on which floats the ship from which he cast.”¹⁰² By multiplying biblical references as they do, in a layering of signs that shuns no redundancy, the sketches lend authority to the king’s penitential politics. Henri III emerges against a backdrop of references, making him a focal point around which the emblematic biblical figures of repentance are rearranged in order to give more depth and meaning to his own. The fact that the public is shown doing good deeds after the example of the marchers in the processions clearly means that the king’s exemplarity, reinforced by biblical exempla, must been seen as effective: the sketches show the fantasized success of the king’s new political strategy and present repentance and charity as social practices that are accomplishable by all those who witness the processions.

The stakes of such propaganda are fairly clear. Staging the “extension” of penance into the body politic, representing the effectiveness of its signs and symbols on the public, imply that the individual is now viewed as part of a new system of obligations and exchange. It is now not simply a matter of scrutinizing oneself through exercises in repentance, but also of constituting and reinscribing one’s actions within a larger network of social relations. Although the same, of course, could be said about the traditional ways of penance (a sinner was also included into a structure of social obligations, for instance, with the priest, the Church, and so forth), the difference here seems to rest in the way repentance is represented as a universal model circulating in the city. Again, the spectacle and ceremonial of mortification in these sketches has a direct impact on the body politic: repentance reforms the people and moves them to publically perform good works and other good actions for the benefit of society. The dramatized mobilization of penitential institutions (religious orders, confraternities) does not merely intensify repentance, it gives it a new social worth. No longer able to remain neutral or

indifferent to repentance, the individual is forced to resituate and redefine him- or herself within this changing religious practice. Should he or she participate in the penitential processions? If so, to what extent and in what way? What is morally appropriate? What is unacceptable? What attitude should he or she adopt towards those who practice it? Even moderate Catholics found that they had to reposition themselves publically and personally in relation to the processions. Such representations of the practices of penance clearly sought to promote the inscription of the individual within a new and heightened system of religious and political obligations. They also defined an ensemble of faults that the subject could be accused of committing if he or she did not properly adhere to this new set of rules.

In the context of the Wars of Religion, Henri III’s processions, and their relaying through texts and sketches such as these ones, were partly a provocation against Protestants, who disapproved of ostentatious and idolatrous representations of piety, such as the bearing of relics and images. Upholding the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Protestants generally understood repentance as the product of God’s forgiveness towards sinners, but believed that it was only after the offender had received divine grace that he or she could be moved to perform good works. Unlike what was the case for the Roman Catholic Church, repentance, for Protestants, could never be understood as functioning in a dialectic of debt and reparation: performing good works was certainly virtuous, but it could not buy back one’s soul. What the sketches we have studied attempt to achieve is precisely to portray the Catholic processions as an effective way of reintegrating sinners back into the fold: in this respect, they can be read as a direct affront to Protestants. If Henri III had hoped to entice Reformers back into the Church “[…] par ceste voye douce [de la repentance] et par son exemple de devotion,”¹⁰³ such a claim

¹⁰³ Gassot, Sommaire-Mémorial, 159. Edmond Auger himself claimed that the penitents marching in white sackcloths constituted a much more powerful spectacle for conversion than seeing soldiers wreak havoc and ruin in
willfully ignored the symbolic violence of the processions. An open imposition of the Catholic dogma onto the public—and not just any form of it, but an extremely ostentatious one—, the king’s penitential processions, unlike the idyllic social harmony portrayed in the sketches (which symbolically erases Protestants), could only intensify religious hatred: in the end, they deepened the tensions between the parties as theological differences became more pronounced and defined.

As the sketches also make clear, this transformation of repentance into a tool for the Counter-Reformation had a spatial dimension. The processions throughout the streets of Paris were a way of extending Catholic observances of penance into the very space of the city. As Robert Schneider stated, there “was indeed an aspect of all processional ceremony which brought Church ritual into the streets, turning the Cathedrals inside out, so to speak […]” This extension of repentance into the urban space had the effect of making it more sacred:

A stream of processions, those staged by religious orders, parishes and the many lay confraternities old and new, served to mark urban space with signs of the sacred, for even the smallest processional display cast a spell of reverence over a city street or plaza, forcing by-standers to pause, doff their hats, genuflect and cross themselves as they acknowledged the passing cross, statue, relic, or the Host itself.105 The king’s penitential processions can clearly be understood as having similar ambitions as the ones evoked here. The city and its streets became the loci of symbolic rites of purification, the marchers seeking to purge them from all their “wickedness.” Repentance was a way of inciting the people to cleanse their souls, not just as individuals, but as a group. The shared “soul” of the streets of Paris: “Ne doit-ce pas estre un spectacle plus doux et agreeable à messieurs nos maistres, et Pasteurs (que je nomme par honneur) de ce grand peuple Parisien, de voir tant de nobles Seigneurs marcher par leur ville, endossés de ces habillemens blancs, que ce qu’ils veirent aux premiers, et seconds troubles [religieux], à leur porte, et presque dans les entrailles de la ville, des troupes ennemis de penitence, toutes couvertes de cazaques blanches pour tout mettre en ruine.” (Metanoeologie, 124-125).


105 Ibid., 125.
nation, the one contaminated by the “ills” of Protestantism, was the ultimate object of this purification.

One should be careful here, however, not to reproduce in its own terms the triumphant ideological message at work in these processions and representations. If the king had tried to “popularize” repentance, so to speak, by advancing the growth of old orders, creating new congregations, and fashioning his royal persona around penance, such political measures had their limits and were not necessarily well received within Paris. Even if theologians such as Edmond Auger and Christophe Cheffontaine praised Henri III’s penitential politics, the majority of Parisians showed resistance to them: some mocked the king’s processions, while others were bewildered or even scandalized by them. It is essential to return here to the figure of Henri III and to analyze some of the ways in which his personal relationship to penance seemed to create a series of social and political tensions that would come to complicate the concept and its reception.

*The King’s Critics: Repentance as a Character Fault and Weak Politics*

In his *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, Pierre de l’Estoile describes a seemingly minor incident that occurred shortly after the first procession of the *Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre Dame* at the royal court:

[...] le Roy fist fouetter à Paris au Louvre jusques à six vingts, que pages, que laquais, qui en la Salle Basse du Louvre avoient contrefait la procession des Poenitents, aians mis leurs mouschoirs devant leurs visages, avec des trous à l’endroit des yeux faisans la cerimonie telle qu’ils avoient veu faire aux Penitens de la Confrairie du Roy. La mascarade de ces gens de bien de pages, nouveaux Penitents, estoit (à ce que disoient ceux qui la virent) assez bien dressée et plaisante, hormis qu’elle faisoit peur aux petits
Although Henri III was unappreciative of the levity of this playful “procession” and harshly punished its participants, the masquerade of pages seems to have been understood by many as a pleasant and good-humoured joke. The Parisian ambassador for Ferdinand I, le baron of Busbecq, also saw humor in the fact that the make-believe penitents had unwillingly come closer to resembling real ones:

Mais ce qui est risible est que les laquais, qui sont en grand nombre au service de la noblesse, ayant, dans le Louvre, contrefait, pour se divertir, les processions de cette confrérie, le Roi en fit prendre environ quatre-vingts qu’il fist fustiger d’importance dans la cour des cuisines, qui emportèrent les marques effectives des flagellez, qu’ils n’avoient prétendu représenter qu’en fiction.107

If a certain lightness of tone characterises such accounts of the incident, it is important to remember that most of the pamphlets, *sornettes*, and *pasquils* written against the king’s congregation and processions were more caustic and serious.108 Such is the case with passages of the *Tragiques*, in which the Protestant poet Agrippa d’Aubigné harshly denounced the hypocrisy of the new penitents, and no doubt would have seen the page’s masquerade not as a mere jest, but as unveiling the true theatrical nature of their model:

Les ordres inventés, les chants, les hurlements,  
Des fols capuchonnés, les nouveaux régiments  
Qui en procession sottement déguisées  
Aux villes et aux champs vont semer des risées  
L’austérité des vœux et des fraternités,

106 L’Esteil, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, t. 4, 78. According to Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, “prendre le daru,” refers to a lighthearted game in which a pretend or real hunter pursues an animal or imaginary one, and then after catching it, throws it into a sack. (Ibid., 117.)


Tout cela n’a caché nos rudes vérités :
Tous ces déguisements sont vaines mascarades
Qui aux portes d’enfer présentent leurs aubades,
Ribauds de la paillarde, ou affêtés valets
Qui de processions lui donnent des ballets :
Les uns, mignons muguets, se parent et font braves
De clinquant et d’or trait ; les autres, vils esclaves,
Fagottés d’une corde et pâles marmiteux,
Vont pieds nus par la rue abuser les piteux,
Ont pour masque le froc, pour vêtements des poches,
Pour cadence leurs pas, pour violons des cloches,
Pour vers la litanie ; un avocat nommé,
A chaque pas rend Christ, chaque fois, diffamé. 109

The Reformer compares the penitents’ habit and walk to those of dancers in a ballet: the froc is but a mask, the march of the pale and pitiful penitents resembles a cadence, with church bells acting as their musical accompaniment (“pour violons des cloches”) and litanies simulating the verses of the dance. The processions were a masquerade, the product of misplaced theatricality. 110 The “froc” and the mask were evoked in many satirical pamphlets: if the members of the king’s congregation believed that veiling their faces symbolized the rejection of the flesh, many people associated it with other social-cultural references, consciously or unconsciously subverting it. As Robert A. Schneider notes, although the hooded shroud was supposed to play “a role in the campaign against Mardi Gras and other public ‘seductions and vanities’ […],” it also “offered an alternative form of costuming to the masks and disguises worn by Carnival revellers […].” 111 In Peter Bruegel the Elder’s The Battle of Carnival and Lent, as


110 Parisians were accustomed to other types of spectacular productions given by Henri III, which had a similar penchant for theatricality (ballets, masquerades, dances, academies, etc.). For instance, many had called the marriage of Henri III’s favourite, Anne de Joyeuse, to the queen’s half sister, Marguerite de Lorraine-Vaudémont, in 1581, the most sumptuous display of royal splendor in all of the sixteenth century. See figure 6.

Schneider again remarks, the allegorical figure of Lent, a gaunt and lanky penitent wearing a partially hooded sackcloth, confronts the masked partisans of Mardi Gras in a compositional face-off that suggests the painter clearly perceived a certain “[…] symmetry between the Carnival mask and the penitential cagoule.” The shrouds of the penitents functioned, to be sure, as uniforms and were “signs of confessional militancy, but they were also costumes, for a magistrate would slip into his cagoule to assume the role of penitent, only to return later to his luxurious ermine robes […].” Thus, even though the king’s processions were performed, as we have to assume, in earnest, the very habit worn by the marchers could remind the public of the costumes and celebrations of Mardi Gras.

Criticism of the penitential hood also took other forms. Veiling the face not only effaced the gaze of the individual, depersonalizing him, but it also masked his social status: “the hooded shroud negated the penitent’s social identity by hiding his normal attire and thus disguising his standing in society.” The penitents seemed to want to both disappear as individuals and to merge into a powerful and homogeneous community: “Their shroud and veil served as a uniform that disguised distinctions of rank and dress and allowed members to assemble as equals, while

112 Ibid., 130.

113 Ibid., 135.

114 Pierre de l’Estoile indeed gives us an another example of the ways in which the king’s festivities at Mardi gras, which were too hastily followed by his austere penitential devotions of Lent, led many to believe that his penance was insincere: “Aux jours gras, le Roy fait mascarades, ballets et festins aux dames, selon sa mode accoustumé, et se donne du plaisir et du bon temps tout son saoul ; et perseverant en ses devotions (que beaucoup appelloient hypocrisie), le premier jour de careme se renferme aux Capussins, faisant ou faignant y faire penitence avec ses mignons.” (Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, t. v., 262)

projecting to onlookers the image of a crusading gathering of a spiritual elite.”\textsuperscript{116} But this negation of the personal identity of the wearer had different implications for the king. Parisians were confused as to why Henri III would want to hide or efface his social rank and identity, raising a barrier between him and his people: why would the most powerful figure of the monarchy purposively choose to negate his authority with a gesture of humility that seemed to be antithetical to his social function? Moreover, for his critics, the hypocrisy of this act was striking. If the king, in an act of extraordinary humility, actually hoped to hide his social identity by wearing the fully hooded sackcloth, it was in apparent contradiction with his desire for exemplarity. True anonymity, the complete concealment of his personal association with the Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre Dame, would have diminished the chances of success of the new penitential politics he promoted. In fact, the congregation itself was composed of the socially elite (i.e. nobles d’épée, the royal court’s clergy, etc.): only members of the monarch’s entourage of favorites were allowed to join it, not the so-called common rabble. Moreover, even if their habit was meant to efface their rank and royal dignities, everyone knew it was the king and his favorites marching through the streets of Paris. And the procureurs of the congregation, who showed each member their seat during the Church service, were completely aware of the identity of each of the penitents:

\begin{quote}
N’entrera personne dans la chapelle, qui ne soit revestu, et recogneu par les Procureurs, lesquels pour ce faire seront tenus demeurer hors la porte de la chapelle, en laquelle chacun Confrere entrant, sera tenu se découvrir le visage devant lesdits Procureurs, puis se recouvrir, pour le moins, jusques à ce qu’ils aient fait leur devotions devant l’autel, à genoux. […]\end{quote}\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 128.

\textsuperscript{117} [Auger], Les Statuts de la Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Nostre Dame, 47. “Il y aura deux Procureurs perpetuels […]qui demeureront hors la chapelle durant le service, pour reconnoistre au visage les Confreres qui entreront en la chapelle, et les cotter sur un rolle où leurs noms seront escrits […]” (Ibid., 58).
Thus, although the members of the congregation might have sought to appear more penitent by hiding their identity, it was obvious that such anonymity and relinquishing of their temporal privileges, in addition to being momentary, was in fact more symbolic than real. This was even more true in the case of the king, who was always, so to speak, on stage, his body always public. As Ernst Kantorowicz has famously shown, kings were seen as both human and divine, private and public, mortal and immortal.\footnote{Ernst Kantorowicz, \textit{The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology}, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1957).} Such was also the case with Henri III, who could never truly hope to represent penance during these processions both as a \textit{private} act and a \textit{public} one. His public identity always took precedence over his personal one. The monarch’s body was inescapably bound to representation: his private person could not be separated from his social and political function. Even with his body and face hidden by a sackcloth, the king could not truly erase his political status nor reduce his body to that of a private penitent indistinguishable from those around him. It was in fact precisely this endeavor to isolate his personal penance, his private identity, from his public one, that seemed to disturb Parisians. Henri III’s desire both to escape his social and political function in order to practice personal penance in humility before God \textit{and} to stand out as a model of penitential exemplarity was contradictory. The blurring of his private and public roles broke with convention and led to confusion as Parisians tried to decode his new penitential practices and this incongruous display of a private persona.

There were other occasions for misunderstanding the penitential spectacle performed by the king and his congregation. Pierre de l’Estoile’s description of the simulacrum of Henri III’s procession that had been staged by his pages and footmen—who had \textit{“mis leurs mouschoirs devant leurs visages, avec des trous à l’endroit des yeux”}—makes interesting mention of the
children’s fright at the sight of the hooded shroud, which could be associated with a well-known and anxiety-provoking tale: “[la mascarade] faisait peur aux petits enfans. Car il semblait proprement, à les voir marcher allans comme à tastons et pas mesurés, qu’ils s’accheminassent pour aller prendre le Daru.” As Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck have noted, the tale of the Daru, often told to scare children or to make fun of naïve hunters, referred to an imaginary animal or wild game caught in a sack. The presence of the masked penitents provoked more than fear in children, however, for it also disquieted adults. It evoked, for instance, the hood of the plague doctor, which was used to isolate its wearer from infected air and disease: “As ministers to the sick, whose treatment hurt or even killed more than they cured, these enshrouded médecins de la peste were hardly a welcome sight to the besieged populace.” They portended death. In fact, the shrouded robe was considered, if not the garment of Death itself (the skeleton of Death wore a cowl in many representations of the Middle Ages), one symbolically closely associated with it. As the statutes from the Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre Dame made clear, the penitents’ robes would also be their burial shrouds: “Chacun des Confreres, mourant, sera enterré revestu avec son habit, le visage descouvert, fors les Evesques, Prelats, et Princes qui le voudront autrement, lesquels en ce cas l’auront pour le moins sur le


120 “‘Aller prendre, ou envoyer au Daru’: ‘envoyer un naïf par un grand froid avec un sac ouvert, en un endroit où on lui affirmait que les daru devaient passer; le chasseur devait répeter daru dam sak, jusqu’au moment où ce gibier imaginaire se jetterait dans son sac’ (FEW). Le daru, désignant une bête ou un gibier imaginaire, finit également par désigner le chasseur sot et incrédule. Huguet parle, à propos du daru, d’une ‘sorte de chasse au miroir’.” (L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, t. 4, 116-117). According to Robert A. Schneider, it was “reported that the first procession of the Blue Penitents of Toulouse in 1575 caused children to cry out in terror and flee its approach.” (“Mortification on Parade: Penitential Processions in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century France,” 131)

121 Schneider, (“Mortification on Parade: Penitential Processions in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century France,” 131.)
Donning the *cagoule* on the *lit de mort* was another example of ascetic monastic practices used by the king’s penitents. It was not the only association with death the sackcloth suggested. The habit could also summon the image of the “*plourants,*” who accompanied funeral processions (i.e. the hooded gown was used as a mourning robe), just as the veiled face could evoke the hooded victims put to death by executioners (*les bourreaux*).  

Besides being reminiscent of figurations of death, the habit also conjured in the minds of Parisians associations with criminality and punishment. For many, it evoked the harsh legal practices of the Middle Ages, in which a criminal was forced to repent and humiliate himself in public. The fact that both Auger and Cheffontaine explicitly sought to counter such unwelcomed associations gives a clear indication of their prevalence: Henri III’s congregation was not performing the “*pénitence publique ancienne*” in which “*certaines sortes de gens criminels*” were veiled and required to pay the penalties for their excesses, nor was it the “*penitence

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122 [Auger], *Les Statuts de la Congrégation des pénitents de l’Annonciation de Nostre Dame*, 23.


124 “[…] on a depus par ordonnances, et de l’Eglise, et des Princes, coffré certaines sortes de gens criminels, les faisant ou tondre, ou, si c’estoient femmes, voiler, à fin d’y paier les dures amendes de leurs excès. Cé qui s’est fait voire à l’endroit des eclesiastiques, ausquels, comme j’ay desja dit, on ne mettoit ceste penitence publique, pour este fondée sur des crimes, la plus part, que l’Apostre nomme comme justes empeschemens d’estre estre Pasteur, et legitimes occasions d’en estre debouté, n’ayant plus propte forme de remede que la deposition du convaincu, suget à excommunications, depositions, suspensions, et degradations de leur estat, qui doit estre saint, sans tache, et reprehension. ” (*Auger, Métanoeologie*, 156).
“La penitence publique selon les Scolastiques, est celle qui est imposée par le confesseur, ou prélat inférieur à l’Evesque à estre faicte publiquement, pour quelque péché public.” (Cheffontaine, *Apologie de la confrarie des pénitents*, 38). Cheffontaine also distinguishes the king’s ceremonies from the three “scholastic” types of penance: “Sur ce que nous disons de la penitence publique, et solenelle, et secrète, faut noter que nous ne prenons pas en ladite Apologie penitence en tels sens que la prennent les Scolastiques quand il divident la penitence en sa secrete, et la publique et en la solennelle. Car alors ils prennent penitence, non pour penitence en tant qu’elle est vertu, ne pour penitence en tant qu’elle est sacrement, mais pour penitence en tant qu’elle signifie la satisfaction, imposée au penitent par son confesseur quand il a confessé ses pechés. // Mais nous prenons icy penitence, pour les satisfactions volontaires, que le penitent entreprend faire, à sa propre devotion, sans qu’elles luy ayent esté enjointes par son confesseur ou par son prétal, lesquelles font celles des confreres de la confraternité dont nous parlons en l’Apologie.” (*Ibid.*, 36).

The penitents of the king’s congregation were supposed to gain in reputation by their penitential devotions. They were “troupes volontaires, deliberées de vivre Chrestiennement, et selon les ordonnances divines, et pleines de volontés, bonnes et qualifiées de toutes gens de marque, et de là où les Ecclesiastiques, ne peuvent rapporter qu’honneur et edification […]” Not obligatory nor forced, their actions were considered voluntary satisfactions (“satisfactions volontaires”), which the penitents would undertake by virtue of their “propre devotion et volonte, et non par commandement, ny de leurs confesseur, ny de leurs Evesques, ny pour aucun manifeste et public.

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125 “La penitence publique selon les Scolastiques, est celle qui est imposée par le confesseur, ou prélat inférieur à l’Evesque à estre faite publiquement, pour quelque péché public.” (Cheffontaine, *Apologie de la confrarie des pénitents*, 38).


127 Auger, *Métanoeologie*, 156 [sic], 157-158.
Although both Auger and Cheffontaine attempted to persuade critics that the penance of the king and his congregation was sincere and wholly unstained by infamy (“elle ne les tasche d’aucune macule d’infamie”\textsuperscript{129}), such an endeavor seemed ineffective. It was difficult for Parisians to “forget” medieval associations, especially since aspects of ancient practices were still observed (Henri IV’s conversion later in 1593 would perhaps be the most notorious example of this public repentance). There was also the fact that Henri III continued to perform penitential ceremonies until the very end of his reign, with an unrelenting consistency which in the end raised suspicions about his moral character: what horrible sins was he guilty of to continue repenting as he did, without end? There was something odd, inciting mistrust and doubt, about a monarch who lingered over past and present faults. Many people wondered what the king was in fact hiding, what crimes he was concealing behind the masked face of his habit.

This growing distrust towards the king led to a number of ad hominem attacks that reached an apex at the end of his reign, crystalizing, as we will see in the following chapter, into a full-fledged theological-political crisis. Some of the most biting criticisms, however, to emerge earlier in his reign in 1583 concerned Henri III’s sexuality.\textsuperscript{130} As Pierre de l’Estoile’s collection of various pamphlets, sornettes, and pasquils confirms, Henri III’s penance—“celte fouetterie et

\textsuperscript{128} Cheffontaine, \textit{Apologie de la confrarie des pénitens}, 36, 38-39.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid.}, 39.

penitence nouvelle du Roy et de ses mignons”\textsuperscript{131}—led to a series of attacks pertaining to the masculinity of the king and his penitents. Henri III was accused of being a sodomite, a “bougre,” perhaps the most slanderous accusation possible to wage against him since homosexuality—“le péché contre nature”\textsuperscript{132}—was one of the worst sins a man could commit. These defamatory attacks remained almost unchallenged until the twentieth century. Although historians have now begun to question the construction of the gendered discourse around the king and his “mignons,” little work has been done on the reasons why it emerged at precisely the same time as Henri III’s capitalization on repentance and orchestration of a penitential spiritual reawakening.\textsuperscript{133} The pasquils of 1583, in fact, clearly suggest a close relationship between the attacks on his sexuality and his recently adopted penance:

Vous qui este humilié / Pour servir Dieu de cœur humain, / Nouveaux Penitents, n’oubliez / D’avoir toujours le fouet en main.

Ils sont accouplés deux à deux / D’une assez devote maniere : / Mais je les trouve vicieux, / Quand ils s’enfilent par derriere.

Ils sont advisés et bien sages / D’ainsi se couvrir les visages ; / Car on verroit, entre les bons, / Les bougres et les bougerons.

[…] Le Roy s’est rendu penitent, / Pource que des enfans il n’a. / Mais, entendez pourquoi cela: c’est à cause qu’à peine il tend.

[…] Il [Henri III] a choisi la Bonne Dame / Pour la patronne de ses vœux : / Mais il aime mieux, sur mon ame, / Un jeune fils aux blonds cheveux.

\textsuperscript{131} L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, t. IV, 80.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 82.

Les Penitents seulement / Ont fait de leurs culs ouverture; / Mais on dit que ce Penitent / Fait le pecché contre nature.\(^\text{134}\)

It appears clearly from such quotes that the hidden body of the penitents—represented by the habit and the hooded face—was the object around which the homophobic discourse of their detractors could be constructed. Open displays of virility and vigorousness were negated by the veiled body: the ascetic mortification of the penitents undermined conventional associations with the male figure, who was often represented engaged in hunting, war, acts of vaillance, heterosexual prowess, and so forth. The whips with which the penitents lashed themselves passed as a sign of weakness—not of self-control or male strength. Because they wore the sackcloth, the penitents were seen as adopting the meek humility of monks, their obsequious obedience, their self-abasement. Although the king and his penitents in no way embraced the celibacy of religious orders, the fact that they had adopted the monks’ habit as well as many of their other disciplinary exercises of mortification suggested as much. The references to the king’s inability to father a child, and thus produce an heir to the throne, is but one allusion we see in the passage above: “Le Roy s’est rendu penitent, / Pource que des enfans il n’a / Mais, entendez pourquoi cela: c’est à cause qu’à peine il tend.” Plainly put, as the telling rime “penitent”/“tend” rather bluntly underscores, the king had no children because he couldn’t have an erection: his celibacy was forced, and that was why he dressed as a monk. Of course, since the monarch’s power rested in part upon his capacity to produce a male heir, and to perpetuate his lineage, such imputations concerning his masculinity constituted serious attacks. The accusation of impotence was closely linked to that of homosexuality. A long tradition of “promiscuous” monks had, to be sure, populated the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and homosexuality was a

\(^\text{134}\) L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, t. IV, 81-82.
conventional *topos* used to negatively depict them. Celibate monks were always, to some extent, under suspicion: why did these men repudiate the “natural” reproductive order of the universe? Were they suppressing or hiding something? If a muffled discourse on the possible homosexuality of monks existed, it was unabashedly transparent in the pasquils above, which crassly insinuated that the penitents embraced some of the artifacts and practices of monasticism because they were homosexual. The allusion made to the penitents “*accouplés deux à deux,*” who “slipped” into each other (“*s’enfilent par derriere*”), clearly suggested this, as well as the remarks intimating that the “true” apertures in their sackcloths were the ones at their backsides (“*les Penitents seulement / Ont fait de leurs culs ouverture*”). Henri III himself, as we see, was not exempt from such attacks. Although he appeared to have chosen the “*Bonne Dame*” as the “*patronne de ses voeux*”—a reference either to the Virgin Mary or to the allegorical figure of Repentance—he preferred in fact young boys (“*un jeune fils aux blonds cheveux*”). The king’s mignons, many of whom belonged to this penitential congregation, were evidently the kind of young men targeted in such a politically charged attack.

From 1583 onwards, the question of the king’s masculinity would in fact continue to arouse suspicions. In 1586, for instance, during the celebrations of the Annunciation of Our Lady, when the king performed a pilgrimage to Chartres with his penitents and then later marched in a procession throughout Paris, Pierre de L’Estoile himself could not help but comment on Henri III’s loss of virility due to his participation in these monastic devotions:

“*Voilà comme ce bon Prince (au grand contentement de messieurs de la Ligue, ses ennemis) vivot plus en Capussin qu’en Roy, n’aimant plus la guerre, son champ de bataille estant un cloistre, et sa cuirasse un sac de Penitent.*”135 This criticism, which was later taken up by Leaguers, targets the king’s failure to participate in typically “male” pastimes, warfare being the

one *par excellence*, and his desire to appear as a monk. The courageous days of his youth, when he was commander at the battle of Jarnac and Montcontour during the third war of religion, appeared to be over. Such male valor previously expressed on the battlefield had been marred by the king’s politics of repentance and monastic devotions.

In the end, these accusations of unnatural celibacy, sterility, or homosexuality, which sought to dissociate him from traditional “male” roles, served to stain the king’s moral character as well as undermine his political power. Even if theologians like Edmond Auger worked hard to convince people that this promotion and reactivation of repentance in no way diminished the authority of Henri III and of his followers, it seems doubtful that such arguments worked.

Negative representations of the king marching throughout Paris in the habit of a monk began to affect, little by little, not only the way he was perceived, but also the validity of the model of penance after which he attempted to fashion himself.

**Conclusion**

By founding and fostering penitential religious orders, participating in spectacular penitential processions, having theological treatises written by his closest allies and spiritual

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136 Edmond Auger seems to be aware of these criticism and attempts to counter them in *Metanoeologie* “Je ne vois fondement aucun en la peur de plusieurs, que ceste morne Penitence rabatte trop la force, la magnanimité, et hardiesse des grands seigneurs, car comme tout ce qui à apparence et tiltre de vertu ne l’est pas, aussi son seul bras soustient proprement tout le courage et vivacité de l’homme […]” (96-97). Pierre Matthieu would evoke a similar argument when he discussed the problems Henri III had with the Holy Leaguer: “Il est à pied, la Ligue à cheval, il porte le sac de penitent, elle a la cuirasse sur le dos, et oubliant les armes que la nature et la necessité luy presentoit, il recourt à l’encore et au papier, il fait sa declaration, mais si froidement que vous direiz qu’il n’ose nommer son ennemy, et qu’il ressemble un homme qui se plaint sans dire qui l’a battu.” (Histoire des derniers troubles de France, sous les règnes des rois...Henri III et Henri III par Pierre Matthieu, Lyon: E. Bonaventure, 1596, 28); “Ceçar n’opposoit que l’authorité de son visage à ses legions mutinees, mais c’estoit avec une assurance nayve et entiere, non douteuse ny tremblante. Si le Roy eust monstre son front à la Ligue non couvert d’un sac de penitent, ou d’hermite, non par une voye de douceur et de mollesse, mais avec une fermeté, un courage, une resolution convenable à sa Majesté, il eut fait voir qu’il estoit Roy, la vraye et vive image de Dieu, qui avoit le foudre prest en la main pour accrazer ceux qui s’eslevoyent contre luy, la guerre seroit finie, l’armee du Duc de Guyse, qui en ses premiers bonds, et en sa fleur n’estoit que de mille chevaux et quatre mille hommes de pied fut dissipee en moins d’un mois, et le Cardinal de Bourbon avoit bien confessé à la Royne Mere que si le Roy eut esclaté son authorité contre luy tous ses brouillats se fussent esvanouys.” (Ibid., 30-31).
counsels, and possibly encouraging the circulation of printed representations of his works, Henri III, it seems, sought to achieve the transfer of a heretofore mostly theological concept, and through it, of a monastic model, into the political sphere. One of the consequences of such measures was to upend and reshape the common understanding of repentance, and to further blur the separation between theology and politics. In the representations of Henri III as the king of Nineveh, we have noticed the staging of a double exemplarity, whose desired consequence was to pacify society by rendering it more virtuous: penance’s regulating force was to be validated by the monarch’s support through a direct reference to a positive biblical model. The monarch’s exemplum was supposed to officiate a kind of injunction or moral imperative. Its aim seems to have been direct behavioral modification: the penitent subject was to reevaluate his or her moral faults and begin on the path of amendment. But Henri III’s efforts to impose a penitential model on society, to mortify the body politics through the public promotion of penance, almost immediately started to encounter opposition from diverse corners of the public, and what we have shown in the last part of this chapter already seems to suggest the limits of this project. The reactions of Parisians to the penitential persona cultivated by Henri III and to “new” public form of penance were mixed, if not overall negative. And yet, as we will now see, despite such resistances and accusations, which at first glance would appear to prove that Henri III’s religious politics had failed, the negative reception of penance can also be paradoxically understood as having reinforced its value: weren’t the attacks made against the king proof that his politics had disrupted the normal modus operandi of penance and forced his subjects to rethink the concept? Wasn’t it in the name of a certain idea of penance that the king’s penitential politics were rejected?
In the early 1580s, Henri III had begun to publicly promote a politics of penance, with the alleged goal of pacifying a war-torn society and rendering it more virtuous by making it more Catholic. If criticism of the king’s politics had emerged almost at the onset of his project, by the end of the 1580s, a shift had occurred in how it was perceived. Whether it was done consciously or not, many Parisians opposing royal power, along with Leaguers, had slowly assimilated some of the monarch’s penitential practices and transformed them. Being repentant in 1588-1589 implied something very different than it did in 1582-1583—a break with the basic beliefs, rituals, and rules of penance that Parisians had previously practiced. Displaced and transformed, repentance no longer represented an act leading to reconciliation and restored civil harmony, but rather one of disobedience. As processions and penitential spaces became sites of political resistance and contestation for dissident political parties, such as the ultra-Catholic League, penance was wrested from the authority of the monarch and became both an instrument of subordination and a force of emancipation and revolt. The questions that we will address in this chapter deal not merely with the circumstances and particulars surrounding this new mobilization of repentance and the challenge it presented to the king’s politics, but also with how it continued to affect the public sphere even after the king’s assassination. What were the political-theological
stakes of this new expression of repentance, which had extraordinarily intensified by the turn of the 1590s?

_A Parody of Penance: Henri III and the Procession to Chartres_

The Day of Barricades (12 May 1588) marks an important turning point in the history of the politicization of penance.¹ Fearful that Henri III would appoint Henri of Navarre, a Protestant, as his successor to the throne, and that he would imprison important Leaguers, the people of Paris spontaneously rose up against him by arming themselves against his soldiers and barricading the streets.² Under the serious threat of losing his life, the king escaped through the _Porte neuve_ and fled to Chartres to seek safety. Because of its intensity and the numbers involved, the rebellion was thought to be a considerable threat to Henri III’s crown and to the stability of his government. However, as passions settled in the weeks following the uprising,

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² Henri III allowed the Swiss guards to enter Paris because he was suspicious of Henri I, the Duke of Guise’s intentions: he believed Leaguers might be preparing a _coup_ against him.
Parisians began to see the situation in a different light. They had disobeyed their king, who, as tradition held, derived his authority from God: Henri III was His lieutenant on earth and represented His divine will. In order to remedy, however temporarily, this unstable political situation, Leaguers and members of the French court initiated a series of discussions with the king and sent deputations to Chartres, as Pierre Mathieu wrote a few years after the fact:

On envoie les Cappucins pour parer les coups de la cholere du Roy, mettre de l’eau au feu, par les autres enflamé, recalmer les orages de sa juste indignation, et à present on envoie des plus apparens de tous les ordres de la ville, pour le supplier tres-humbllement de ne mettre l’innocence des citoyens de Paris au jugement de leurs ennemis, considere les justes mouemens qui avoyent forcé le peuple à se defendre, eslonger de ses aureilles tous les rapports et advis contraires, ne differer son retour à Paris, où il sera reçu avec autant d’applaudissement et d’esjouyssance que ses sujets ont eu de regret quand ils ont sçeu son depart, et où il trouvera des meilleurs serviteurs que ceux qui luy avoyent conseillé de les destruire et d’en sortir.3

Several conciliatory events were organized.4 One stands out in particular, which took place at the end of May 1588, a couple of weeks after the Day of Barricades: the penitential procession that set out from Paris to meet the king in Chartres and to seek his pardon. Surprisingly, it has received very little attention from historians and specialists of the period.

In his Chronologie novenaire (1608), Pierre Victor Palma Cayet (1525-1610) described the procession as a way to prepare “le Roy à pardonner et à appaiser sa juste colère.”5 While this outwardly act of contrition was indeed presented by some as a legitimate and effective

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4 For example, a deputation from the Parliament of Paris, solicited by Catherine de Medici, was sent to negotiate peace with Henri III.

5 Jean Choisnin, Collection complète des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France. Mémoires de Jean Choisnin ou Discours au vray de tout ce qui s'est fait et passé pour l'entière négociation de l'élection du roy de Polongne, (Foucault: Paris, 1823), vol. 38, 381. The introduction to Chronologie novenaire is at the end of volume 38.
means to amend for the actions that had forced the king out of Paris, it was also meant to provide an explanation for the people’s sudden defiance and uprising: Parisians had thought that the Swiss guards, who had entered the city on the orders of Henri III, had been sent to massacre them. If they had resisted, it was in the belief that they were protecting their lives and their city. This was, it was argued, an understandable motive for their rebellion, which imparted it with some degree of moral legitimacy, even if it was still, in the end, illicit. The procession of penance from Paris to Chartres was supposed to be an act of renewal, a means to restore Parisians’ loyalty and allegiance to Henri III.

However, it did not entirely succeed in its mission, for unlike the previous penitential processions, which were governed by a solemn and stern decorum, it was marred by a tone that could only be described as *comical*. In a passage reproduced in the 1734 edition of his *Histoire universelle*, Jacques-Auguste de Thou gives an interesting description of the cortege, which deserves to be read *in extenso* to grasp the extent of its satirical force:

[...] pour renchérir sur les cérémonies ordinaires de ces sortes de processions de Pénitens par quelque trait de son invention, il [Frère Ange] imagina, pour représenter la chose de la Religion la plus sérieuse et la plus rédoutable, de jouer avec une dizaine de ses Confrères, Capucins comme lui, la scène du monde le plus ridicule. A la tête de la Procession marchoit un homme avec une longue barbe, sale et crasseux depuis la tête jusqu’aux pieds, couvert d’un cilice, et portant par dessus un large baudrier, d’où pendoit un sabre récurbé, qui d’une vieille trompette (a) rouillée, tiroit par intervalles quelques sons aigres et peu harmonieux. On l’eût pris dans ce ridicule équipage pour un de ces Vagabonds qui menent des Ours par les rues, ou pour un vendeur d’orviétan, ou bien pour un joueur de goblets. Après lui venaient trois autres hommes, avec des yeux et un air farouche, ayant chacun en tête une marmite en guise de casque, et portant sur leur cilice une cotte de maille et des gantelets, armés outre cela de piques et de halebardes couvertes de rouille, afin que la mal-propreté des armes répondit mieux à l’austerité de leur vie, et à la crasse de leurs habits. Ces trois personnages se démenoient beaucoup, pour écartier la foule qui se trouvait sur leur passage, et trainoient après eux Frere Ange lié et garotté. Celui-ci, revêtu d’une robe blanche, comme celles dont les Prêtres se servent quand ils font le service, ou d’une aube, et portant une couronne d’épines sur une perruque, d’où sembroient découler sur son visage des gouttes de sang, comme si les épines lui eussent réellement percé la tête, trainoient une longue croix de carton, sous le poids de laquelle il paroissoit succomber, tombant par intervalles, comme si les forces lui
eussent manqué, et poussant les gémissements les plus douloureux. A ses côtés marchoient deux autres jeunes Capucins, aussi vêtus de blanc, sous la forme de deux jeunes Vierges, l’un représentant la Vierge Marie, et l’autre Marie-Madeleine, qui, les bras croisés sur la poitrine, élevoient les yeux vers le Ciel, en faisant couler quelques fausses larmes, et se prosternant comme en cadence toutes les fois que Frere Ange se laissoit tomber. Ils étoient suivis par quatre satellites, du même air et dans le même appareil que les premiers, et tenant les cordes dont Frere Ange étoit garotté, sur lequel ils déchargeoient de grands coups de fouet avec un bruit terrible. Une longue suite de Pénitens fermoit la marche de cette pompe comique. Ce fut sur les trois heures après-midi qu’ils arriverent à Chartres. […] Ce qui augmenta encore le ridicule de cette scene, c’est que, comme il faisoit fort chaud, la sueur qui découloit du visage de Frere Ange, ayant lavé ces gouttes de sang postiches qu’on lui avoit appliquées pour exciter la compassion des spectateurs, ses Confrères le firent passer dans une chapelle voisine, pour le barbouiller de nouveau ; mais comme la foule du peuple qui l’environnoit étoit si grande qu’il ne fut pas possible d’en fermer les portes, cet accident pensa gâter tout.  

If merely because of the sheer redundancy of symbols it offers the spectator, this biblical gathering of a variety of figures known for their exemplary acts of penance already seems to be undermining the significance of the procession. Frequently depicted in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance as the penitent saint par excellence, the beautifully contrite adulteress, the peccatrix poenitens, Mary Magdalene marches alongside the mother of Christ, and both are shedding tears of sadness and adoration. Leading the procession is a bearded man, most likely an allegory of Job, caked in filth and clad in a cilice—the famous hair shirt, often worn in secrecy, under clothing, but here flaunted as a symbol of repentance. Even more grotesque is the figure of Henri of Joyeuse, count of Bouchage, renamed Frère Ange (Frater Angelus) after he

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7 For a survey on the biblical and hagiographic confusions concerning Marie-Madeleine during the Middle Ages, and which persisted even into the sixteenth century, see Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, Marie-Madeleine dans la littérature du Moyen Âge (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997).
joined the Order of the Friars Minor Capuchin, who has given himself the most prestigious role in the production. Bound and fettered, clothed in a white “habit de pénitent,” he reenacts the passion of Christ, dragging a cardboard cross down the road and pretending to falter from time to time under its burden. When it comes to judging this spectacle, Pierre de l’Estoile is of one mind with Jacques-August de Thou: he ironically dubs it a “nouvelle espèce de dévotion.” The ascetic practice of mortification and penitential discipline had now been transformed into an occasion for theatricalization and laughter.

The contrast with Henri III’s processions, which we analyzed in the preceding chapter, couldn’t be more obvious. They were dominated by a tone of sanctity and solemnity: this new instance of public repentance almost seems to be their reversed mirror image. Before we delve more in depth into the political significance of this event, as well as others related to it, we have to ask why the opponents and enemies of the king chose to desacralize penance precisely in this way. The comical dimension that De Thou reacted to is evidently characterized by archaic elements: there is something medieval about this mingling of the religious and the farcical, which needs to be analyzed in more detail if we are to understand the full import of this act of resistance against the authority of the king by the Holy League and other Counter-Reformation forces.

Beyond its obvious ridicule, there was indeed another reason why this procession was subject to criticism. Jacques-Auguste de Thou not only called it a risible spectacle, a “pompe

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comique,” or a “dévotion mal entendue,” but he also saw it as something resembling a farce:

Le roi avoit envoyé ordre à la garde de les laisser entrer dans la ville; et au milieu d’une foule de peuple et d’enfans qui couraient à ce spectacle, comme à une farce, ils s’avancèrent vers la Cathédrale, dans laquelle il entrèrent après Vêpres, dans le tems que le Clergé faisoit dans la nef ce qu’on appelle la Station.”

The suggested proximity with the comic plays that complemented medieval religious theater, or with what Charles Mazouer called the “théâtre du rire,” is striking. By calling it a farce, De Thou reminds us of the negative associations that had developed around this genre at the end of the sixteenth century. The farce (a word whose etymology—most scholars now agree—should not be derived from farcir, to stuff, as is usually assumed, but rather from farcer, a work destined to make one laugh) had retained a more or less positive connotation during the Late Middle Ages, but its social and cultural reception had changed by the Renaissance. The poets of the Pléiade (apart from Jodelle’s comedy L’Eugène perhaps), along with many other humanists and scholars, rejected the genre: compared to the Greek tragedies of Sophocles or the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus, farces, moralities, sotties, mysteries, and miracle plays were at best second-rate literature. By the second half of the sixteenth century, a scission had ensued between a new literary elite and traditional popular theater. Thus, a penitential procession that resembled a farce, especially one that the king and his court were destined to see, incurred the risk of appearing as nothing less than a mockery.

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11 Charles Mazouer, Jean-Claude Aubailly, Elizabeth Lalou, and others critics are right to point out that during the Late Middle Ages one should be careful to distinguish religious and profane theater, and that terms such as tragédie and comédie—in their modern, classical sense—only began to develop at the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth.

Pierre de l’Estoile’s interpretation of the event also confirms that it was perceived by many as a gothic resurgence rather than as a public ceremony of political appeasement taking place at the end of the sixteenth century. While underscoring the comical aspects of the procession, he suggests that it is reminiscent of the mystery play, another popular dramatic genre of the Late Middle Ages.13

Ce jour, trente cinq capucins, précédés par frère Ange (naguères sieur Du Bouchage), qui portait la croix, s’en allèrent, à beau pied et nus pieds à Chartres trouver le Roy, entrent en ladite ville de Chartres chantans comme si c’eust esté une procession. Dont tout ce peuple de Chartres, espandu par les rues pour les regarder, estoit etonné : les uns trouvans beaux ces nouveaux misteres, les autres s’en rians et s’en moquans, et beaucoup s’en offensans, comme si on eust voulu se servir des cerimonies de la religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine, pour masque et risée.14

By casting it as a “new” kind of mystery play, L’Estoile is alluding here to a number of archaic aspects of the spectacle—the most obvious one being its staging of the Passion of Christ.15 It is well known that gruesome and realistic performances of the deaths of Christ, the Apostles, and

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13 “L’appellation mystère est traditionnelle et d’ailleurs tout à fait médiévale, la plus ancienne mention du mot dans le sens de « pièce de théâtre » se trouvant dans les fameuses lettres de Charles VI données en 1402 aux confrères de la Passion de Paris : le vieux mot mistere s’y enrichit des connotations de sa double étymologie : ministerium (métier, œuvre manuelle, entreprise) et mysterium (office liturgique, service religieux, mystère de la foi). Au début du XVe siècle, mystère désigne souvent de simples mystères mimés ; le mot s’impose bientôt pour les pièces dramatiques et l’on précise souvent alors mystères par personnages. Mais si le mot mystère est le plus souvent employé dans les incipit, on trouve aussi vie, histoire, jeu, miracle, voire passion, martyre, représentation…Jamais le Moyen Âge s’est soucié de définir un genre du mystère.” (Mazouer, Le théâtre français du moyen âge, 165-6). For a good introduction to farce and mystery plays in the Late Middle Ages, see Charles Mazouer, Le Théâtre français du Moyen Âge, (Paris: Sedes, 1998); Jean-Claude Aubailly, Le théâtre médiéval profane et comique (Paris: Larousse, 1975); Bernadette Rey-Fraud, La Farce ou la Machine à rire. Théorie d’un genre dramatique (1450-1550), (Droz coll. « Publications Romanes et Françaises »: Genève, 1984); Louis Petit de Julleville, Histoire du théâtre en France. Les mystères, (Paris: Hachette, 1880). The latter’s work is outdated, but still contains useful information. See also his Les Mystères (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 2012).

14 Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III. vol. VI, 43 (My emphasis).

15 The Passion of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and other New and Old Testament biblical subjects, such as the sacrifice of Abraham, were typical subjects of medieval mystery plays. The three most successful depictions of Le mystère de la Passion were written by Arnoul Gréban, Jean Michel, and Eustache Mercadé d’Arras. However, most mystery plays were anonymous and only twenty or so are in fact named or identifiable. Furthermore, they were also often copied, shared, edited, altered, supplemented, and abridged as they were used in one town and another, which makes it that more difficult to identify their authorial sources.
the martyred saints were enacted during these dramas, and that they often incorporated scenes of feigned torture and punishments: bodies—or their mannequin equivalents—were flogged, beaten, whipped, quartered, chained, stoned, and burned. Jean Fouquet’s illumination of Saint Appollonia in the Livre d’heures d’Étienne Chevalier at the Musée Condé in Chantilly is a famous example. A clear parallel can evidently be drawn here between these plays and Frère Ange’s own performance in the procession. The latter is undoubtedly reviving these plays when he reenacts the sufferings of Christ and is inflicted with lashes from his “bourreaux,” and so forth. One could also draw a connection here with the emerging literary genres developing at this moment, such as the Histoires tragiques, or the form of theater referred to as the “théâtre de la cruauté,” where macabre scenes were staged in an obvious reaction to the violence of the Wars of Religion.

Although a number of other elements from mystery plays are clearly present in this procession, the chief point of interest for our study is their relationship to the comical, since it is precisely this aspect that Pierre de l’Estoile notices when he doubts the legitimacy of the

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16 Mazouer, Le théâtre français du Moyen Âge, 161, 236.

17 It is also interesting to note that mystery plays were, in fact, discredited, censured, and officially prohibited by the Parliament of Paris in 1548, even if they clearly still continued to exist in France long afterwards: “Qu’on les combine (un mystère ou une moralité avec une farce, souvent) ou qu’on les représente seuls, non seulement les genres médiévaux passent tels quels au xviè siècle, mais il y restent vivants, parfois jusqu’à l’aube du siècle, suivant. Ni naissance; ni renaissance en ce domaine.” (Mazouer, Le théâtre français de la Renaissance, 15). By the end of the sixteenth century, however, their popularity did decline and both Protestants and Catholics, albeit for different reasons, no longer accepted mystery plays because of the ways in which these plays dealt with Biblical texts and religion in general. The comical aspects incorporated into the plays became connoted with irreverence and impiety. As Mazouer argues, the Renaissance was beginning to dissociate the sacred from the profane: “le mystère traditionnel est victime d’un raidissement des mentalités religieuses, d’une volonté, commune aux catholiques et aux protestants, de pureté et de respect du sacré : respect de l’Écriture, rectitude théologique, refus de tout ce qui est bas, méfiance à l’égard du rire. Ces croyants sincères ne tolèrent plus ce que le mystère médiéval tolérait. » (Ibid., 55)

religious ceremony of repentance ("comme si c'eust esté une procession") and compares it to a mystery. It is the derisive aspect of the play that makes him criticize it, for it is well known that these types of plays were notorious for their scenes of irreverence, mockery, and even profanation. Charles Mazouer’s work on mystery plays makes this aspect evident:

[...] on rit dans les mystères. Pour détendre les spectateurs soumis à la rude épreuve de longues et bien édifiantes représentations? Uile dulci? Peut-être bien. On a plus d’une fois relevé les multiples formes du comique dans les mystères – humour, raillerie et caricatures, comique verbal, scatologie, dégradation parodique et grotesque –, dressé la liste des personnages comiques – le vilain, le messager, le fanfaron, le fol et les diables – et tenté d’expliquer leur présence. Il est de fait que les mystères prévoient, en véritables hors-d’œuvre, des scènes de farce.20

19 It would of course be misleading to suggest that the procession was an exact representation of a mystery play, as it might have been understood by fifteenth-century fatistes or acteurs. The Capuchins may have been miming scenes from the Passion of Christ, but they were not speaking per se. Music accompanied the procession, but no actual dialogue was heard, nor were biblical stories expounded, which was a typical element of mystery plays. Furthermore, Lucifer and his devils leading the damned into “la bouche d’enfer” are also absent. There were no set “houards” (scènes) dispersed around the city, decorating the public square, the market place, or the halles, nor were there any theatrical machines or special effects (“secrets”) used to animate scenes, such as the deluge, Christ’s ascent into Paradise (a type of volerie), the descent of sinners into Hell (a fosserie), and so forth. (See Elie Konigson, Henri Rey-Flaud, Graham A. Runnalls, and Charles Mazouer’s work for a more comprehensive explanation of these plays). However, even if there are differences between mystery plays and the procession of Capuchins, some striking similarities still exist. To begin with, both of them have a strong relationship to religious drama in general. In fact, mystery plays were originally performed in silence, or accompanied by vocal chants: a longtime descendent of liturgical drama, they were initially mimed or pantomimed, and even represented as simple tableaux vivants without words or gestures (Mazouer, Le théâtre français du Moyen Age, 144). Composed for the instruction and edification of the people, they resembled, one might say, a photo book, in which you passed from one image to another in order to “read” the play. That is to say that before mysteries became literary productions with dialogues, they were first and foremost visual representations. Another important similarity that exists between mystery plays and this procession is the way in which they incorporate movement into their production. Both of them dramatize their ceremony by moving from one location to another and by using the public space to be seen. During mysteries, it was not uncommon for spectators to move from one houard or platform to another, or for the scenes themselves to be displayed on movable carts or chariots. Indeed, they incorporated a “processional-like” movement into their very staging: “Il semble qu’on n’ait jamais tout à fait abandonné les solutions qui impliquaient la mobilité et le parcours [pendant les mystères], à l’image de ce qui se pratiquait pour les entrées royales et les mystères mimés, le cortège des spectateurs se déplaçant sur un parcours le long duquel étaient dispersés estrades. L’autre solution consistait à installer la scène sur des chars, qui défilaient devant les spectateurs, comme pour les pageants anglais ; le Nord de la France connaissait les jeux sur cars, et, récemment, un érudit américain, Alan E. Knight, a retrouvé un manuscrit de soixante-douze petits mystères donnés sur des chars au cours d’une procession traditionnelle à Lille, de 1430 à 1469.” (Mazouer, Le théâtre français du moyen âge, 155, 31. See Alan E. Knight, “Processional Theater in Lille in the fifteenth century,” in Le théâtre et la cité dans l’Europe médiévale, Fifteenth Century Studies, vol. 13 (1998), 347-358.

20 Mazouer, Le théâtre français du moyen âge, 149.
Élizabeth Lalou also insists on the inclusion of comical characters alongside sacred figures in the miracles and mysteries:

Les personnages comiques d’autre part ne sont pas l’apanage du théâtre profane. Les miracles et les mystères accueillent aux côtés de la Vierge Marie ou du Christ des personnages comiques. Les personnages de bourreaux (qu’on appelle « tirans » dans les mystères), de vilains ou de fous, sans compter les diables se multiplient au fil du temps.21

It would be a mistake then, as many scholars have noted, to associate the comical register solely with profane theater, because the comical was also incorporated into the very fabric of religious drama, as mystery plays so clearly demonstrate. In fact, the dichotomic vision of theater that couples the comical with the profane, and the religious with the sacred, is a modern notion:

[…] la vision du mystère est une et totalement religieuse. Et elle est assez large pour englober le tout de la vie : le sacré, la souffrance, les larmes, la sainteté, et aussi le rire, la raillerie, la satire, le péché, la folie et sa contestation, la parodie et le grotesque qui désacralise. La distinction entre sacré et profane est moderne ; dans le mystère, tout est sacré, tout est finalement soumis à la Providence divine.”22

If the mystery play was considered entirely religious in the Middle Ages, even with its inclusion of laughter, satire, madness, sin, and so forth, by the second half of the sixteenth century, this understanding of theater had changed. With the humanists’ rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman Theater, the reception of mystery plays was no longer positive, as we can see from L’Estoile’s reaction. The procession was considered a crude and lowly imitation of the Passion. It vexed because it no longer corresponded to sixteenth-century aesthetics. For a variety of reasons (the most important one being the scission between Catholics and Protestants during the

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22 Mazouer, Le théâtre français du Moyen Âge, 150. See Mazouer, Le théâtre français de la Renaissance, 3.
Reformation and Counter-Reformation), the religious could no longer be as deeply connected to the comical as it had been during the Middle Ages. Two distinctly opposing categories were in fact forming during this period—at the one end, the tragic and the serious, considered superior and preeminent, and which would eventually be associated with the term *tragedy*; and at the other end, the profane and the comical, inferior to the former, and which would be associated with the term *comedy.* In the end, this shift in sixteenth-century tastes was reflected in the comments of writers of the period such as Pierre de L’Estoile or Jacques-Auguste de Thou. The farce, mystery plays, and other medieval forms of drama, were deemed unfit to be performed in troubled times.

How, then, are we to interpret the incorporation of these archaic dramatic forms in this penitential procession—both the farce and the mystery play? It is clear that they undermine, to some extent, what was purported to be an act of reconciliation towards the king. There is an element of resistance in this retrieval of old forms being performed in public spaces: it seems that behind laughter the possibility of disorder lurks. By refusing to follow the common protocol of previous penitential processions—one that had been established, in the preceding years, by the king himself—the Leaguers were opening up the possibility of a repetition of the Day of Barricades: it is as if, rather than being an apology and an attempt to seek absolution from the king, this procession secretly sought to achieve the opposite effect, bringing about a sort of joyful violence in the aftermath of the insurrection. By rereading De Thou’s and L’Estoile’s account of the procession with this idea in mind, we see a series of clues and signs suggesting that the Capuchins’ staging of repentance was governed by the trope of inversion and a sort of

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carnivalesque desire to desacralize the king’s political authority. The presence of elements relating to Carnival, one of the many Catholic celebrations integrated into the liturgical calendar, is striking here. This festival was not only the occasion for days of joy and laughter, feasting and masquerading, but it was also a moment of social, moral, and political transgressions. The laughter, derision, and irreverence that took place during this time were more or less tolerated because of the fact that they were succeeded by the conversions and repentances of Lent, with which they offered a striking contrast. As Mikhail Bakhtin’s seminal—albeit now dated—work on the material aspects of Carnival has shown, in particular on base corporeality and grotesque realism, the festival emphasized the materiality of the body.\(^{24}\) It was associated with the lowering of the high, spiritual, and ideal. It was a celebration of the flesh (carne).\(^{25}\)

Elements of the carnivalesque are undeniably present in the depictions given of the procession to Chartres. One figure in the procession, who is “sale et crasseux, depuis la tête jusqu’au pied,” and who is wearing a cilice adorned by a large baldric supporting his sabre,

\(^{24}\) As innovative as Bakhtin’s work was on medieval carnival, it has also been largely criticized because of its analysis based on Marxist tenets. Martha Bayless’s summary of the problems are useful to keep in mind: “All manifestations of carnival, according to Bakhtin, are the product of the lower classes or the folk in medieval culture and express limited but vital resistance to the social order that keeps them subjugated. His paradigm is thus based on a polarity between the solemn, oppressive upper classes and the merrymaking, rebellious lower classes. The cogency of Bakhtin’s analysis depends on this dichotomy between “official,” serious, formal culture and “unofficial” informal, often humorous, popular culture. […] In Bakhtin’s view, the relegation of humor to the folk level was the result of a historical trend of class oppression. […] As the political structure of society evolved, the upper classes safeguarded the stability of the social order by putting strict limits on humor, which, Bakhtin implies, would otherwise foster irreverence and hence insubordination. As a result, humor and carnival were preserved only among the lowest and least powerful classes, who presented the least danger to the established order, and who were allowed to express levity only in strictly controlled ways. Bakhtin thus equates seriousness with order and power, humor with disorder and subversion. To allow the oppressed classes to let off steam, those at the top of the hierarchy set aside times for licenses quasi subversion. This paradigm appears ill suited to the Fools’ Festivals, carnivalesque celebrations conducted by and for the clergy, an elite sector of society. […] The cornerstone of Bakhtin’s polarity between official and unofficial culture is that humor was exclusive to the folk. But this contention is in blatant contradiction to the abundance of parody, satire, and humor in Latin, the language of the educated elite. Bakhtin’s claim that such literature is the product of an oppressed cadre within the elite cannot withstand historical scrutiny. […]” (Martha Bayless, Religion and Humor in the Middle Ages, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996, 179-180.)

\(^{25}\) The Italian word carnevale is an alteration of carnelevare—literally the removal of meat (carne, flesh).
resembles more a charlatan selling drugs ("un vendeur d’orviétan"), a deceiving cheater ("un joueur de gobelets"), and a vagrant ("un de ces Vagabonds qui mènent des Ours par les rues"\textsuperscript{26}) than he does a Capuchin monk. The connection to the animal in this last description also summons the well-known images of the wild man, a popular mythical figure in artwork and in medieval literature, who, because of his hirsute appearance, was associated with the bear. He was a standard character in Carnival and the fête des fous:

À partir du XIII\textsuperscript{e} siècle, l’homme sauvage est représenté dans des jeux, au moment des fêtes des fous, puis lors du Carnaval ou des Charivaris, et à l’occasion d’Entrées royales. Les récits de la capture de l’homme sauvage opèrent un rapprochement entre lui et l’ours qui s’exprime dans les fêtes qui commémorent le réveil du plantigrade après son hibernation ; ces festivités sont sans doute les traces de rituels païens très anciens ; alors “des hommes se couvraient de poils, se transformaient en ours mâles.”\textsuperscript{27}

Whether or not the friar is compared to a duplicitous merchant and swindler, or to a vagabond wild man leading a bear through the streets (with his ciline only further accentuating his hairiness), he clearly fails to represent the popular image of his religious order. Dirty and ill clad, he did not, contrary to what was expected, exemplify the vows of poverty of his order nor the eremitical lifestyle that Capuchins were reputed to practice. The austere oaths of penance and self-abnegation typically pledged by Capuchins are strangely reinterpreted as the friars parade their penance with ostentatiously visible cilices and strange military attire.

The next three friars in the order of De Thou’s description are ferocious in appearance. Each is wearing a cooking-pot for a helmet ("une marmite en guise de casque") and is dressed in a ciline shielded by a coat of mail, with gauntlets covering the hands. All three are also carrying

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corroded pikes and halberds. The least that can be said is that this unconventional attire seems more reminiscent of a carnivalesque procession by Breughel the Elder or Hieronymus Bosch than of a penitential one. The grotesque surfaces here as the procession turns into an ambulant kitchen scene: instead of adopting traditional military helmets, or more appropriately, the hood of the Capuchin order, the *cappucio*, the friars find a substitute in cooking equipment, giving the impression that they are headed to a banquet rather than to the Cathedral in Chartres. The signs of penance become blurred and confused in the heteroclite mixing of the attire. Pots and hair shirts are transformed into military dress, as if repentance could be accomplished in an act of self-derision. The carnivalesque aspects of the scene give the impression that they are taking over and effacing the individual signs of penance, which are represented by the empty pots and the dusty clices. All that is left over for the gaze of the amused or incensed spectator is an eccentric, chimerical, and monstrous cortege marred by a character of incompleteness. Never truly conforming to one world or another (the domestic, the religious, or the civic), the friars convey an image of disorder and comic hyperbolism.

The description of Frère Ange is also very telling. His crown of thorns placed on a wig ("*couronne sur une perruque*"), his cardboard Cross ("*croix de carton*"), and the fake blood dripping off his body drenched in sweat—all of these props meant to enhance the dramatic power of this redemptive Passion only serve to further highlight the carnivalesque bent of the procession. Because these details come together to amplify the grotesque aspect of the scene, in the end, our attention is drawn not towards the spirituality of Christ, but towards a body that is not *really* suffering, and therefore, not really *repentant*. Inviting us backstage, as it were, De Thou insists on a simulation that is no longer operative:

> Ce qui augmenta encore le ridicule de cette scene, c’est que, comme il faisoit fort chaud, la sueur qui découloit du visage de Frere Ange, ayant lavé ces gouttes de sang postiches
The spectator’s gaze is not merely focused on Christ’s sufferings, but is caught up in the clumsy and artificiality of this rigged street-theater Passion. From the high to the low, the dignified to the base, the procession misses the mark because the body irrupts onto the scene as a comical object: it disturbs and troubles precisely because true suffering is absent. What might have been a solemn ceremony of prayer, amendment, and conversion is now a parody of penance.  

Although we could enumerate a variety of other carnivalesque aspects in this procession (such as the fact that Marie Madeleine and the Virgin Marie were, in fact, men dressed in drag), the pith of the matter is that all of these comical elements, as we have already suggested earlier, have a decidedly subversive character, and it is precisely this aspect that destabilizes the solemnity and sacredness of the procession. That is not to say that the question of its reception is without ambiguity. In a way, we are left wondering whether or not the friars indeed meant to mock penance and the king, or whether they simply happened to be the victims of their own inept enthusiasm. Recall that some spectators seemed to be receptive to the aesthetic choices of the procession, as L’Estoile remarked with irony: “les uns trouvans beaux ces nouveaux misteres.”

The ambivalence or the equivocal aspect of the comical elements in the procession—its

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oscillation between the serious and the farcical—renders the religious ceremony troubling and difficult to interpret. And yet, this is typical of the carnivalesque, particularly if we remember Bakhtin’s statement: Carnival laughter is “ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives.”

However, no matter how ambiguous the procession appeared to be, its comical aspects underscored the political conflict at work between Catholic Leaguers and the king. Many believed that the procession to Chartres was, in fact, a pretext for the Holy League to extend its political interests and network of influence, as well as bolster the authority of its chief leader, the Duke of Guise. The Leaguers had, according to De Thou, implicated powerful figures like Étienne de Neuilly in the procession in order to force “ceux qui dans cette ville [Chartres] tenoient pour leur parti, à prêter un nouveau serment de fidélité au Duc de Guise […]”

In the end, many considered the procession to be a ploy. It was an act of disobedience and passive revolt against the king, and indeed, it appeared that the Leaguers who had joined the king’s Confrérie de Pénitents only a few years earlier were now using penitential processions similar to those the monarch had initiated during his reign, except that now the goal was not to reform France or reinstate peace and harmony, but to revolt against the king. One of the most striking aspects of this procession is the fact that the Leaguers are clearly parodying the king’s own processions (see chapter one). The ceremony was not a supplication for forgiveness, nor an act of reparation for the wrongs committed during the Day of Barricades, but rather seem to be another occasion to undermine Henri III’s authority.

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31 Bakhtin, Rabelais, 11-12.


33 In order for something to be truly parodied, it is dependent “for its effect upon recognition of the parodied original, or at least upon some knowledge of the style or discourse to which the allusion is being made.” See Simon Dentith, Parody, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 39.
Il semble qu’il étoit du destin de ce Prince [Henri III] que tout ce qu’il avoit le plus ardemment aimé contribuât à hâter sa perte. Il y avoit cinq ans qu’il avoit institué à Paris une Confrérie de Pénitens : il se trouvoit lui-même assez souvent à leur processions, portant l’habit des Confrères, dans la persuasion où il étoit qu’il pouvoit par-là se rendre agréable à Dieu et aux hommes. La plupart mème des Ligueurs s’étoient enrôlé dans la Confrérie. Ils prirent donc le prétexte d’aller ainsi en procession jusqu’à Chartres, pour reconnoistre de plus près l’état des affaires du Roi, et disposer le peuple de cette ville, qui jusqu’alors avoit tenu le parti de ce Prince, à secouër à la première occasion le joug de l’obéissance.  

The procession was a way of colluding with distant League members, spying on the affairs of Henri III, and compelling the people of Chartres to take sides with the Catholic League against the king, as the Parisians had done only a few weeks earlier during the Day of Barricades. Pierre de l’Estoile equally seems to believe that the procession had all but pure intentions when he describes the reaction of shocked spectators: “beaucoup s’en offensans, comme si on eust voulu se servir des cerimonies de la religion Catholique, Apostilique et Romaine, pour masque et risée.”  

Furthermore, it was only a couple of weeks later that the Holy League forced the king—to his great regret and dissatisfaction—to sign the édit d’Union, which rigorously allied him to their cause.  

The edict not only extended the League’s power, but most importantly reinforced Catholicism as a fundamental law: in order for a king to reign in France, he had to “vivre et...”

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34 De Thou, Histoire universelle, 206-7 (My emphasis).


36 “Le Roy fist ce second Edit de Juillet pour la Ligue, autant contre son cœur que le premier, et le vid on pleurer en le signant, regrettant, ce bon prince, son malheur, qui le contraingnoit, pour asseurer sa personne, de hazarder son Estat.” (L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. VI, 61-62.) The articles, which would eventually become the édit d’Union, were worked out by Leaguers and the king in Rouen during the month of June and July in 1588.

37 After the assassination of Henri III by Jacques Clément, Henri IV tried to go around this law and convince others to obey him, in despite of his Protestantism, but this proved ultimately to be impossible. His eventual conversion to Catholicism, whether it was sincere or not, suggests that Counter-Reformation politics were still very powerfully at work in France even after the publication of the Edict of Nantes in 1598.
mourir en la religion Catholique Apostolique, et Romaine,” and promote its advancement and conservation “sans faire jamais aucune paix ou tresve avec les heretiques ny aucun Edict en leur faveur.” 38 It was, to be sure, an attempt to thwart the Protestant Henri of Navarre’s claim to the throne.

Even the idea of selecting Henri of Joyeuse (Frère Ange) to serve as the leader in the procession seems to have been politically motivated: it was well know that the Capuchin was a former mignon of the king. In all likelihood, the Leaguers had chosen Henri of Joyeuse out of insolence and disrespect for Henri III: “[…] ils lui [Frère Ange] représentèrent pour l’y engager, que ce spectacle de dévotion ne pouvoit manquer de faire plaisir à un Prince aussi religieux que le Roi ; ce sont les termes dont ils se servoient pour l’insulter. 39 The procession was, in fact, a pretense and an act of aggression used against the king. Even if Frère Ange’s intentions in the procession had been sincere, Henri III was surprised by the participation of his former favourite:

[…] ce Prince tournant les yeux vers la procession, et frappé de voir un Seigneur qu’il avoit si tendrement chéri, ne peut s’empêcher de dire qu’il plaignoit le sort d’un homme de ce rang, qui, séduit par ses confreres et trompé par les factieux, s’étoit imprudemment mêlé d’affaires d’autrui, et s’exposoit à la risée de tout le monde en faisant parade d’une dévotion mal enten duë. 40

Le Roi […] le réprit très-vivement [Frère Ange] à son tour, d’avoir, par un zèle indiscret,

38 Edict du Roy sur l’Union de ses subjects catholiques. (Paris: Frédéric Morel, 1588), 5-6. “Avons voulu statué et ordonné, voulons statuons,ordonnons; et nous plait, que les articles suyvans soyent tenuz pour loy inviolable et fondamentale de cestuy Royauleme. Et premierement nous jurons et renouvellons le serment par nous faict en nostre sacré, de vivre et mourir en la religion Catholique Apostolique, et Romaine, promouvoir l’avancement et conservation d’icelle, employer de bonne foy toutes noz forces et moyens, sans espargner notre propre vie, pour extirper de Notre Royaume pays et terres de nostre obeyssance, tous schismes et heresies, condamnees par les saïncts Conciles et principalement par celuy de Trente, sans faire jamais aucune paix ou tresve avec les heretiques ny aucun Edict en leur faveur.” (Ibid.)

39 De Thou, Histoire universelle, 207.

40 Ibid., 208.
tourné en ridicule la chose du monde la plus sérieuse, et de s’être mis en quelque sorte à la tête des rébelles, qu’il sçavoit bien être en grand nombre à cette procession. Par ces mots, le Roi désignoit le Président Etienne de Nully et quelques autres, qui avoient suivi Frère Ange en habit de Pénitens dans la vuë de profiter de cette occassion, pour obliger etc.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, even the king knew that the procession was a sham, and could not help but reprimand his former mignon for participating in it. Once again, the choice on the part of the Leaguers and Capuchins to use a procession against the king, parodying the monarch’s own ceremonies, cannot be underscored enough here: even if the Leaguers were worried about the possible punishments they might receive from Henri III, they could have chosen to make amends in an entirely different manner. They could have, for instance, performed the ceremony in a perfunctory manner—superficial and still certainly lacking in sincerity—but less derisive and offensive. It is precisely the fact that they chose to represent it in a comical and carnivalesque way that renders it so different from earlier processions: its derisive character provides the participants with a gestural language with which to revolt.\textsuperscript{42} It would of course be a mistake to suggest that the ceremony was only a political scheme: not all of the participants meant to disgracefully mock the king. However, even if some of the Capuchins and Leaguers were apologetic, the integration of carnivalesque elements into the procession undermined the entire ceremony and served to facilitate resistance towards the king. Even if the procession was not openly seditious, its comical aspects can hardly be ignored, for they were clearly symptomatic of

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., (My emphasis).

\textsuperscript{42} Yves-Marie Bercé’s work on \textit{fêtes} is fitting here when he explains how Carnival has the potential of becoming insurrectional. For more information on the carnivalesque and its ties to revolt, see Yves-Marie Bercé, \textit{Fête et révolte : des mentalités populaires du \textit{XVI} \textit{e} au \textit{XVIII} \textit{e} siècle} (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 1976) 82-3, 77.
the more subversive discourse hidden behind the face of repentance.⁴³

If this penitential procession had been the only act of derision associated with penance after the Day of Barricades, we could have perhaps ignored its historical and political relevance, describing it simply as an inept expression of contrition towards the king. However, this was not the case. The reception was prepared by a context. The way people understood penitential processions already guided the way they talked and thought about repentance. In a text given “par penitence, par M' de Saint Germain, Penitencier du Roy, à ceux de la Ligue, quand ils se voudront confesser et repentir,” published only a few weeks later in Rouen when the king was hashing out the details of the édit d’Union, we find another example of a willful desacralization of penance. In the copy L’Estoile inserts in his text, what starts as a penitential prayer, the Miserere mei Deus, soon veers towards satire and ends up contradicting and undermining its very purpose. This is how he introduces it:

Le XVᵉ du present mois de juin, M. de Villeroy partist de Paris pour aller trouver le Roy à Rouen, et lui porter des articles de l’accord qui se traictoit entre le Roy et ceux de la Ligue. Sur lequel fut fait, audit Rouen, et publié un Miserere mei Deus fort plaisant, illustre de gloses et annotations qui donnent beaucoup de grace à la conardize, n’estoit qu’il est mal convenable et peu seant à un chrstien d’abuser de la parole de Dieu à telles folies et vanités, lesquelles toutefois, en ce temps, estoient mieux recueillies que quelque chose de bon, principalement à la cour, où tout estoit depravé extremement.⁴⁴

L’Estoile draws our attention here to the irreverence of the work and its corruption of the traditional Catholic psalm. By adding supplementary exegeses to each line of the penitential

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⁴³ “L’apparition d’éclairs comiques, de moments de fête dans les commencements des révoltes, et le recours des révoltés aux gestes du folklore pour traduire leurs ressentiments relèvent d’une même explication. Les exemples envisagés autorisent à parler moins de la revendication d’un droit ou d’une culture populaire, que plutôt d’un emprunt naturel, évident, aux traditions ancestrales, aux modes d’expression consacrés par l’usage.” (Yves-Marie Bercé, Fête et révolte, 91)

prayer, each of which was addressed to a specific group or person, such as the Duke of Guise, the Cardinal of Lorraine, or Catherine de Medici, the writer of the *Miserere mei Deus* was subverting the very penance the text purported to be professing. An excerpt from the text will make this clear:

À CHACUN DES PREVOST DES MARCHANS ET ESCHEVINS, ET À BRIGART, PROCUREUR DE LA VILLE.

*Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.*

Ils se sont fiés en la misericorde, douceur et clemence du Roy, pour avoir pardon de leurs fautes.

AUX HABITANTS DE LA VILLE, QUI SE SONT MUTINÉS.

*Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele inquitatem meam.*

Pource qu’il y a multitude d’habitans, faut multitudes de misericordes.

À LA ROINE MERE DU ROY.

*Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccatis meis munda me.*

Pource qu’elle a plus griefvement failli, et qu’elle est cause de tout le mal, elle demande d’estre plus amplement lavée.

[…]

AU DUC DE GUISE.

*Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci, ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis et vincas cum judicaris.*

Pource qu’il ne visoit qu’au Roy seul et à sa couronne, et non à la religion, et que le mal qu’il a fait esté à sa barbe, dedans Paris.

AU DUC DE MAIENNE.

*Ecce enim in inquitatibus conceptus sum et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.*

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45 “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.”

46 “And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity.”

47 Catherine de Medici

48 “Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

49 “To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee: that thou mayst be justified in thy words and mayst overcome when thou art judged.”

50 “For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me.”
À cause de Mr de Nemours, qui faisoit l’amour de sa mere.

[...]

AU DUC DE NEMOURS.
Asperges me, Domine, hissopo, et mundabor, lavabis me, et supra nivem dealbabor.51
Pour ce qu’il dit qu’il a gaingé la verole à la Ligue.

AU DUC DELBOEUF.
Auditui meo dabis gaudium, et exultabunt ossa humiliata.52
Pour ce qu’il aime à gaudir avec les bouteilles et les os de jambon.

The beginning of this psalm appears to be a sincere apology: the gloss of the first line is neutral and affirms the people’s trust in the king’s clemency and forgiveness. However, by the second paragraph of the text, the tone has already changed, and the prayer is undermined by its exegesis. The mutinous rebels, who disobeyed the king, now need a “multitude” of pardons to be forgiven, at least as much as the clemency and mercy of God can give out. The play on the word “multitudinem” underscores the number of wrongdoers and the gravity of their sins: there were, in fact, so many of them that it would take an infinite sum of pardons to absolve them. The commentary is clearly attempting to stress the unpopularity of the king.

The text then moves on to perform a series of personal attacks against different political figures. The main group targeted is composed of Leaguers and individuals whose alliance to Henri III was shaky. In one annotation, the Duke of Guise, the leader of the League, is chastised for having used the Day of Barricades as an instrument to usurp the king’s crown and authority. Another commentary accuses the Duke of Mayenne (the Duke of Guise’s brother) of being a bastard child, the fruit of an affair between his mother, Anne d’Este, and the Duke of Nemours:

51 “Thou shalt sprinkle me, O God, with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.”

52 “To me hearing thou shalt give joy: and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.”
the pun on the Latin words—"in iniquitatibus conceptus sum" ("I was conceived in iniquities")—evidently takes on an entirely different meaning here.53 The line of the psalm addressed to the Duke of Nemours, depicting him as a lewd individual, reaffirms this relationship, but it also situates the origin of his immorality with the League ("il a gaingé la verole à la Ligue"). The reference to Charles I, the Duke of Elboeuf, who takes pleasure in drink and feasting ("il aime à gaudir avec les bouteilles et les os de jambon"), also plays on carnivalesque topoi. The French words gaudir and os displace the meanings of the Latin words gaudium and ossa humiliata in the psalm by shifting the meaning from spiritual joy and humility to material and fleshly pleasures.

The humor in all of these passages plainly stems from the irreverent and subversive exegesis of the original penitential prayer, as well as from the ad hominem attacks they make on specific individuals. Publicizing the political and moral corruption of the Leaguerers, the author appears to have wanted to show that it was impossible for the Leaguers to ever become truly penitent. Whether it was because of their personal vices (adultery, infidelity, salaciousness, immoderation, etc.) or because of their political motives (desire for power, etc.), they are, as a group, incapable of sincere penance and incorrigible in character. Despite their public pleas for forgiveness, or harangues attempting to mitigate the anger of the king, the Leaguers were fundamentally impenitent.

It is worth noting that in this psalm, the commentaries on Catherine de Medici follow a slightly different line of attack. The queen mother, whose failure appears the most significant ("elle a plus griefvement failli"), is blamed as the cause of all of France’s ills ("elle est cause de

53 Charles de Lorraine, the Duke of Mayenne, would go on to be the Lieutenant General of the League after the assassination of his brothers and create a veritable counter-power against the state and monarchy of Henri III.
tut le mal”). She must be cleansed more thoroughly than the others (“elle demande d’estre plus amplement lavée”). The author could not have played on her “légende noire” in a more direct and obvious way: accused of employing Machiavellian political strategies to seize and maintain power, of using nepotism to privilege Italians, and of being jealous and headstrong, Catherine de Medici was undeniably the object of a wide range of criticism. However, these defamatory remarks were not only targeting the queen—they were also an indirect criticism of the king. Henri III was frequently accused of letting his mother rule in his stead, whether it be out of laziness, passiveness, or a general overindulgence in recreation that led him to neglect political affairs. Accusations of this sort were, of course, far from being based on reality. However, they do reveal the extent of the king’s unpopularity and the fact that his political entourage was widely held in disrepute. The affront on Catherine de Medici could thus easily be understood as an attack on the king, which the end of the psalm makes even more manifest:

QUAND LA PAIX SERA FAITE.
Tunc accetabis sacrificium justitiae, oblationes et holocausta, tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.56
Pource que chacun viendra reconnoistre le Roy, et lui rendre et paier les tributs qu’il lui doit.
À MONSIEUR DE VILLEROY.
Gloria Patri et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.57
Pource qu’il a negocié la paix, qu’il en sera loué du Pere, qui est la Roine mere du Roy; du Fils, qui est le Roy; et du S. Esprit, qui est l’Eglise Catholique.58

54 Albert de Gondi, the duke of Retz, and the cardinal and chancellor, René de Birague, were, for instance, two Italians considered to be right-hand men of Catherine de Medici.


56 “Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice, oblations and whole burnt offerings: then shall they lay calves upon thy alar.”

57 “Glory be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
Although the first line of this excerpt, when read out of context, might appear neutral, it is indeed satirical and refers to the peace treaty being hashed out by Henri III and Leaguers in Rouen—it would eventually lead to the publication of the *édit d’Union*. The French commentary of the psalm comically alludes to the prodigality of the king and his need to fill the coffers of the state. The expenditures of Henri III, considered wasteful and extravagant, were the object of recurrent criticisms throughout his reign and a continual source of resentment on the part of his subjects. According to his detractors, he imposed extraordinary taxes on the people to frivolously fund sumptuary ceremonies such as the wedding of his *mignon*, Anne de Joyeuse, in 1581, or to pay for his wardrobe, ballets, theater, *fêtes*, and so forth. The references to the “tributes” France would have to pay the king (“lui rendre et paier les tributs”) is a political jab insinuating that the people would have to contribute much more than just their obedience: not only would their penance be a return to dutiful submission, but it would literally impoverish them. The consensus was that Henri III would almost undoubtedly demand taxes from them to fund the war. The witticism implied in the Latin words *oblationes* and *holocausta* only further illustrates this point: the “offerings” of the people would indeed be a costly sacrifice.59

The address to the secretary of Henri III, Nicolas de Neufville, seigneur de Villeroy, also plainly mocks the king, not to mention Catherine de Medici and the Catholic Church. Each of these figures is compared to the Holy Trinity: the queen mother represents God (“il [Villeroy] en


59 It would be unfair to depict Henri III as using the majority of the royal coffers for his own indulgences. The war was expensive and Henri III was ultimately against it, not because he didn’t desire to convert Protestants to Catholicism, but because it was costly and caused great disorder in France. In fact, part of the reason why he summoned the *États généraux* to Blois a few months later was to force Leaguers—to their great discontent—to participate in funding it since the crown’s treasury was depleted. It was easy to blame the king for high taxes, but many of the Leaguers, however much they pretended to desire it, were unwilling to fund it.
sera loué du Pere, qui est la Roine mere du Roy”), the king personifies Christ (“du Fils, qui est le Roy”) and the Holy Spirit symbolizes the Church (“du S. Esprit, qui est l’Eglise Catholique”).

This gloss on the prayer is particularly derisive and blasphemous in its presentation of an “unholy” Trinity. It makes Catherine de Medici the Father, the head of the Trinitarian union, which is another way of shedding doubt on Henri III’s ability to govern: his mother is God and rules over him. Although there are many other aspects of the text that could be developed in the same way, in the end what must be remembered is that the meaning of the penitential psalm is subverted.60 The text is, as we have just seen, just as much of a criticism of Henri III as it is of the Leaguers, for even if the latter were guilty of immorality and impenitence, the king was also unworthy of repentance. All throughout the psalm, a general disrespect is shown towards him, his family, and his political allies. The prayer, which is traditionally supposed to bring the sinner closer to God, is transformed here into a parody of the actions and characters of both the Leaguers and the king. Just as in the carnivalesque procession we analyzed earlier, penance serves not as means to reconcile the people with the king or to heal damaged relations, but is

60 Earlier examples of parodied liturgical texts, to be sure, existed before the publication of this penitential psalm. There were medieval forms that also imitated and subverted Biblical and liturgical texts, and which targeted genres such as sermons, masses, psalms, prayers (Pater Noster, Ave Maria), creeds (Credo), and other poetic works written in Latin and the vernacular. See Eero Ilvonen, Parodies de thèmes pieux dans la poésie française du Moyen Âge: Pater – Credo – Ave Maria – Laetabundus (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975); Sander L. Gilman, The Parodic Sermon in European Perspective: Aspects of Liturgical Parody From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, GMBH, 1974). The Cena Cypriani (the “Feast of Cyprian”), composed between the IV and VIII century, is probably the earliest example of such a parody. However, there are other texts, which, for instance, mocked the lives of the saints (St Nemo was jokily called St Nobody), or which parodied liturgies, such as “The Liturgy of the Drunkards” or the “Liturgy of the Gamblers.” The Drinkers’ masses were particularly amusing as they substituted expressions like Potemus (“Let us drink”) for Oremus (“Let us pray”), and transformed prayers: the Pater Noster (Our Father) became Potus Noster (Our drink), and Verbum (the Word) became Vinum (The Wine). See Martha Bayless, Parody in the Middle Ages: the Latin Tradition (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 1996), 94. A small excerpt from the Patrenostre du vin (the Patrenostre aux gouliardois), a Goliardic text from the Latin poetry tradition, will make this clear: “Pater noster, biaus sire Dieus, / Quant vins faudra ce ert granz deuls: / Toutes joies, toutes valors / Seront en lermes et en plours. / Qui es in celis.  Clerc et lai / Ne diront ja mès son ne lai, / Quar en vin a trop de deduis: / Vins fet les sons et les conduis. / Sanctificetur. Li bons vins / Que je bui l’autr’ier a Provins / Me mist au fons de mes greniers. / Nomen tuum.  Li taverniers […]” (Ilvonen, Parodies de thèmes pieux dans la poésie française du Moyen Âge, 118.)
rather used as a means to oppose the king using the language of his own penitential politics.

Interestingly enough, after having developed arguments about the subversive instrumentalization of penance in the preceding instances, we could, in fact, make an entirely different case. While it may seem tempting to see the penitential events following the Day of Barricades as undermining the models of repentance adopted by the king—stern, humorless, and solemn processions that were both rigorous and spectacular—another interpretation imposes itself. While the carnivalesque could appear as a form of liberation, an irruption of utopian otherness into the very heart of the city, it can also in many cases act as a reinforcement of the norm and as a reactionary force. As Simon Dentith and other scholars have noted, parodies can be the source of a “series of in-jokes” policing “the boundaries of the sayable.” 61 They can become “the watchdog of national interests,” and fortify social codes of respectability and established forms. 62 Contrary to what might be expected, they can have a normative function that seeks to reestablish the authority of that norm. 63 As we will now see, it appears that the parody of the king’s penitential processions could also coexist with political acts making use of serious forms of repentance.

**Penance as a Political Weapon**

On December 23 and 24, 1588, Henri III ordered the death of two of the most important

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63 Ibid., 192-193.
members of the Holy League—the Duke of Guise and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine. Six months after the Day of Barricades, this execution, which took place inside the king’s bedroom at the Château de Blois, triggered a series of unprecedented social and political reactions. Some of the most visible ones were the numerous processions that occurred in the streets of Paris. For weeks and weeks, from January to March and even into April, Parisians came together to march in prayer and penance. The people of Paris expressed shock and mourned the loss of their beloved Catholic leaders. It seemed to them as if nature herself was partaking in their grieving: “il avoit fait toute la matinée, une si grande pluie que chacun disoit que le ciel pleuroit ou la mort du duc de Guise ou les misères qui devoient suivre cette impitoyable mort.” The Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris echoes the lugubrious mood that enveloped the city: “Incontinent les dites nouvelles venues, tout le peuple de Paris fond en pleurs et depuys le petit jusques au plus grand.” As scholars such Charlotte Bouteille-Mister have noted, the long vigils and funeral services held for the two brothers went clearly above and

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beyond what would have been expected in such circumstances. Pierre de l’Estoile’s description of the public’s reaction to the deaths, which differs little from what other contemporary historians and chroniclers wrote about the event, is revealing:

Le lundi 30e on fist, en la grande Eglise de N. Dame de Paris, ung solennel service pour le remede des ames des deffuncts duc et cardinal de Guise, freres (encores qu’estans martirs, comme la Ligue et les predicateurs publicientoient, voire deifié et canonizé par la S
e Union, ils n’en eussent beaucoup affaire); toutefois, il y eust aussi grand concours et affluence de peuple, comme si ç’eussent esté les funerailles d’un Roy de France, et furent ces obseques tres magnifiques. […] Les mois et jours ensuivans, par toutes les autres Eglises, paroisses et monasteres de Paris et des fauxbourgs, furent faits solennels et devotieux services pour ces deux deffuncts, avec grandes lamentations et regrets du peuple y assistant. Et se peut dire que, depuis que la France est France, rois ni princes aucuns, tant grands et puissans qu’ils aient peu estre, n’ont esté tant honorés, plaints et regretts apres leurs decees, qu’on esté ces deux princes Lorrains apres leur mort, principalement à Paris.

It appears as if L’Estoile were implying that the ceremonies of mourning had been hyperbolically staged in order to achieve a political mobilization of the people of Paris—or at least that they had served to exacerbate the spontaneous popular outrage at the executions. The comparison of their obsequies to those of French Kings implied a reversal in the order of dignities.

These deaths were so striking that they appeared to be symptomatic of an underlying theological crisis. For Counter-Reformation France, the implications were even eschatological. At any rate, Parisians worried that Catholicism was in peril and that the rise of Protestantism would bring the wrath of God:

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[..] chacun s’est mis en prières et oraisons pour appaiser l’yre de Dieu et plusieurs
jeunèrent deux, troys et quatre foys la sepmaine et quelques-uns toute la sepmaine, et se
jeuneyent-ilz ung ou deux jours au pain et à l’eau et ce par le commandement des curez et
prédicateurs. [...]

On ne peut dire combien il se fit de prières, combien de mortifications, combien de luxe
fut réformé [...] On eût dit qu’ils exerçoient les actions de la religion comme si c’eût esté
pour la dernière fois et que le lendemain la religion eût dû estre perdue.

The extreme reaction to the Guises’ deaths both reflected and increased the sentiment that the
destruction of the Catholic Church was looming. There was a surge in public worship all
throughout Paris, the effect of which was to render religious piety more visible. Prayers were
held continuously day and night ("prières continuées nuit et jour")

Portraits and effigies of the
Guises (see figure 1) were hung in schools and churches all throughout Paris, such as at the
collège Marmoustier: "[..] les effigies des ditz deffunctz cardinal et duc de Guyse eslevez en
bosse et estant en un portraict, lesquels y furent huict jours durant et toute la chapelle tendue de
deuil." As a sign of mourning and penance, churches lit candles and hung black serge and
velvet in their chapels, oratories, and sanctuaries. Vigils were “dictes fort solemnuellement et en

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70 *Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris*, 19.


73 *Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris*, 55-56.

74 "[..] toute l’église de Notre-dame-de-Paris fut tendue de deuil de serge noyre et de velours noyrs par dessus, avec les armoyries des dits defunctz cardinal et duc de Guyse. Tout alentour de la dite église estoient cierges ardans de
cire jaunles. Dans le coeur de la dite église y avoit une des belle chappelle ardente qu’on aye point veu encores toute
plaine de cierge ardens, dessoubz laquelle chapelle estoit la presentation des deux defunctz et forces torches
alentour de la dite chappelle, et le dit coeur tout tendu de serge et vellours noy avec pareilles armoires que dessus.” *(Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris*, 43). See pages 44, 52, 56.
musicque fort pitoyable à ouyr.” People wept as they chanted penitential prayers: one service was, for instance, concluded with the penitential psalm De profundis, “qui fut chanté si pitoyablement que beacoup des assistans ne se pouvoient tenir de pleur.” What made this moment so unusual wasn’t merely the number of devotional acts performed. It was also their austerity. In the dead of winter, parishioners, “de tous les ages, sexes et qualités” marched barefoot through the snow-covered streets (“tout fut couvert d’un pied de neige”), often only wearing a thin shirt or linen: “la pluspart [était] en chemise et pieds nuds (encores qu’il fist grand froid), chantans tous en grande dévotion, avec chandelles de cires ardantes en leurs mains.” Also uncommon was the fact that women and children were found in great numbers in these processions: spectators were fascinated by their earnest and unfeigned zeal, as well as by their resistance to the cold. In fact, in January, children were present in the first wave of processions. According to Arlette Jouanna, ten thousand people—including a great number of children—marched to the Saints-Innocents cemetery near the church of Sainte-Geneviève-du-

75 Ibid., 43.

76 Ibid., 56. See also Signes merveilleux apparus sur la ville et chateau de Blois, en la presence du Roy et lassistance du peuple..., (Paris: Nicolas Guiry, 1589).

77 L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. 6, 142.

78 “[...] tous les jours on vacquoit à faire processions et encore que tout fut couvert d’un pied de neige, pour cela ne pour la gelée qui faisoit, on ne laissoit aller aux dictes processions, tant hommes que femmes, garçons et filles, les ungs pieds nuds et les aultres tous nuds couverts seulement de quelque chemis ou autre linge.” (Pierre Fayet, Journal historique de Pierre Fayet sur les troubles de la Ligue, publié d’après le manuscrit inédit et autographe, avec des éclairissements et des notes, Ed. by Victor Luzarche (Tours: Ladevèse, 1852, 58-9). “Les prières continuées nuit et jour en l’une des esglises de la ville pendant une semaine, les processions ordinaires qui se faisoient de jour avec une grande affluence de catholiques consoloipt beaucoup ce peuple en son affliction: mais toute la nuit on entendoit les processions de chacune paroisse auxquelles assisteoient ceux qui pendant le jour avoient travaillé en leurs boutiques, et y assistoient en la saison d’un hyver très rigoureux teste et pieds nuds, avec un flambeau à la main et plusieurs n’estoient couverts que d’un simple linceul sur la chemise. Quand les processions se faisoient de jour avec ces austeritez, la dévotion faisoit pleurer les gens de bien […]” (Histoire inédite de la Ligue, Bibl. Nat. fr. Ms. 23295), 498-9.
Mont. Among the chroniclers to mention the procession, this anonymous one felt the need to point out the young age of the children marching alongside priests, men, and women:

[...] Tant les prestres, les hommes, les femmes que spécialement tous les petits enfans, fils et filles qu'on appelle les processions des Innocens, lesquels s’assemblent tous les jours en quelque église deçà les ponts et vont en dévotion à Sainte-Geneviève, tous à pieds nudz et encore d’entre dix ou douze il s’en trouve tousjours quelqu’un (homme ou femme) qui n’est couvert que d’un simple linge sur sa chemise. On y conte quelquefois d’une seule suite quatre à cinq mil personnes et vous asserre qu’il ne se peut rien voir de plus beau en fait de dévotion, car jusques à minuit les rues en sont toutes couvertes et semble quasi que les jours n’y soient pas assez longs.

L’Estoile also finds the presence of children worthy of notice:

Sur la fin de ce mois, les petits enfans, fils et filles de la ville de Paris, commencerent à faire processions et prières publiques par la ville, allans d’église en autre, en grandes trouppes, marchans deux à deux, portans chandelles de cires ardantes en leurs mains, chantans les letanies, les VII psaumes penitentiaux et autres psalmes, himnes, oraisons et prières, faites et dictées par les curés de leurs paroisses.

As the processions continued into the months of January and February, they became more and more impassioned. Their intensification took the form of penitential practices: fasting, penitential prayers, and acts of mortification (walking almost naked and barefoot in extreme weather, for example) not only became widespread, but also seemed to become the only true sign of sincere devotion. In fact, this shift towards penitential practices as a means of expressing piety became

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79 Arlette Jouanna, *La France du XVIIe siècle, 1483-1598*, (Paris: PUF Collection Premier Cycle, 1996), 598. The writer of *Journal de françois, bourgeois de Paris* describes a similar procession, which occurred on the 30th of January: “Le dit jour de lundy, se fist aussy en la dite Ville [Paris] plusieurs processions ausquelz il y a grande quantité d’enfans tant filz que filles, hommes que femmes, qui sont tous nudz en chemysye, tellement que on ne veid jamais si belle chose, Dieu mercy. Il y a telle parroisse où il se voyt plus de cinq à six cens personnes toutz nuds et à quelques-unes huict et neuf cens, comme à la paroisse Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs et Saint-Estienne-du-Mont et autres, et se selon la grandeur des paroisses.” (44) See also the procession of Jesuit children, 74.

80 Coppie de la response faite par un politique de ceste ville de Paris, aux précédents mémoires secrets qu’un sien amy lui avoyt envoyés de Bloys en forme de missive (Paris: Jouxte la coppie de Jacques Gregoire, 1589), 53.

so powerful that even Carnival and activities associated with it fell into public disrepute. Adults and children replaced the masquerades and frolicking of Mardi Gras with penitential processions:

Le 14 febvrier, jour de Mardi Gras, tant que le jour dura, se firent à Paris de belles et devotes processions, au lieu des dissolutions et ordures des masquarades et quaresmeprenans qu’on y souloit faire les années precedentes. Entre les autres, s’en fist une d’environ 600 escoliers, pris de tous les colleges et endroits de l’Université, desquels la plus part n’avoient attaient l’aage de dix ou douze ans au plus, qui marchoient nuds, en chemise, les pieds nus, portans cierges ardans de cire blanche en leurs mains, et chantant bien devotement et melodieusement (quelquefois bien discordamment), tant par les rues que par les Eglises, esquelles ils entroient pour faire leurs stations et prières. **82**

Mardi Gras no longer seemed appropriate in this context of mourning and penance, and the festival was effectively censured. Expressing piety now meant ridding Paris of activities that could possibly lead to sin. With all of its laughter, merriment, and transgressions, Mardi Gras no longer corresponded to appropriate public behavior. Catholic France was now engaging in a process of general public purification.

Not all of these processions were as unadulterated as they presented themselves to be. As L’Estoile was quick to point out, the Leaguers had not been entirely successful in banishing the follies of Carême-prenant. What he describes resembles what we could call, anachronistically, a return of the repressed: **83**

Le peuple estoit tellement eschauffé et enragé (s’il faut parler ainsi), apres ces belles devotions processionaires, qu’ils se levoient bien souvent de nuit de leurs lits pour aller querir les curés et prestres de leurs paroisses pour les mener en procession ; comme ils firent, en ces jours, au curé [de] Saint Eustache, que quelques uns de ses paroissiens

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**82** L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. 6, 144-145. “Le […] jour de caresme prenant, et jour que l’on avoit accoustumé que de voir des mascarades et folies, furent faictes par les églises de la dite Ville grande quantité de processions qui y alloient en grande dévotion, mesme la paroisse de Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs où il y avoit plus de mil personnes, tant fils, filles, hommes que femmes, tous nudz, et mesmes tous les religieux de Saint-Martin-des-Champs qui y estoient tous nudz piedz et quelques-ungs tous nudz, comme estoit le curé nommé maistre François Pigenat, duquel on faict plus d’estat que d’aucun autre, qui estoit tout nud et n’avoit qu’une haulbe de toile blanche sur lui.” (Journal de françois, bourgeois de Paris, 56).

**83** L’Estoile, who studied law at Bourges and was from the grande bourgeoisie parisienne, also belonged to the magistrate. Accused of being a “politique,” he was imprisoned in 1589.
furent querir la nuit, et le contraignirent à se relever pour les y mener proumener, auxquels pensant en faire quelque remonstrance, ils l’appellerent Politique et Heretique, et fust contraint enfin de leur en faire passer leur envie. Et à la verité, ce bon curé, avec deux ou trois autres de Paris (et non plus), condamnoient ces processions nocturnes, pour que, pour en parler franchement, tout y estoit de Quaresmeprenant, et que bonne maquerelle pour beaucoup estoit umbre de devotion. Car en icelles hommes et femmes, filles et garsons, marchoient pesle mesle ensemble, tout nuds, et en engendroient des fruits autres que ceux pour la fin desquels elles avoient esté institutées. Comme de fait, pres la porte Montmartre, la fille d’une bonnetiere en rapporta des fruits au bout de neuf mois, et un curé de Paris, qu’on avoit ouï prescher, peu auparavant, qu’en ces processions les pieds blancs et douillets des femmes estoient fort agreables à Dieu, en planta un autre qui vinst à maturité au bout du terme.  

However impious some of these processions may have appeared to be, they still highlight the same important fact: a devotional fervor had seized hold of Parisians and was not only sweeping through the city with a terrible vehemence, but was also shepherding in something else, something much more dangerous—namely, an uncompromising and dogmatic notion of what it meant to be a Christian and to properly submit to the doctrine of Catholicism.  


85 Both L’Estoile and De Thou remark the alleged indiscretion of women and girls during these processions, who wore thin flaxen linen shirts exposing themselves to the unabashed eyes of others and the imprudent caresses of bystanders. “Chevalier Domale [D’Aumale]. La Sainte Veufve [Madame de Sainte-Beuve] de Paris. – Ce bon religieux aussi de ce chevalier Domale, qui en faisoit ses jours gras à Paris, s’y trouvoit ordinairement, et mesmes, aux grands rues et aux Eglises, jettoit au travers d’une sarbacane des dragées musquées aux damoiselles qui estoient par lui reconnue et apres reschauffées et refectiionées par les colations (qu’il) leur aprestoit, tantost sur le pont au Change, autrefois sur le pont N. Dame, en la rue S. Jaques, la Verrerie, et partout ailleurs ; à la Sainte Veufve n’estoit oubliée, laquelle, couverte seulement d’une fine toile, avec un point coupé à la gorge, se laissa une fois mener par dessous les bras, au travers de l’Eglise S. Jean, mugueter et attoucher, au grand scandale de plusieurs bonnes personnes devotes qui alloient de bonne foy à ces processions, conduites d’un zele de devoiion et religion, dont ceux qui en estoient les auteurs se moquoient, n’ains esté instituées à autre fin que pour entretenir le peuple tousjours à la Ligue, et couvrir d’un voile de Religion l’inflame perduellion, trahison et revolte des conjurés contre leur Roy, leur prince naturel et souverain seigneur.” (L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. 6, 145-6). “Dans cette vûë ils faisoient dans Paris des processions publiques, où, malgré la rigueur de la saison qui étoit encore assez froide, on voyoit marcher de jeunes enfants pieds nuds, des femmes même et des filles sans pudeur, couvertes d’une simple toile, portant en leur main des cierges allumés, qu’elles étéignoient ensuite aprè certaines prieres en vers, qu’elles chantoient en criant avec des voix fausses et discordantes ; comme si, conformément à ce que la fable nous raconte du tison fatal, de la conservation duquel dépendoient les jours de Méléagre, elles eussent souhaité ou espéré par-là d’éteindre la vie du Roi. Il s’en trouvoit même quelques-unes des plus jolies qui, pour rendre leur dévotion plus agréable à ceux qui en estoient témoins, n’étoient couvertes que d’une seule toile de lin très fine qui n’opposoit aucun obstacle aux regards curieux, ni souvent même aux caresses empressées des jeunes gens qui les conduisoient galamment par dessous les bras.” (De Thou, Histoire universelle, 387).
devotional fervor verging on rage ("échauffé" and "enragé"), the people were now forcing priests out of their beds, in the middle of the night, to lead processions. They were threatening ministers, whom they judged insufficient in their religious zeal, and insulted them in a way that could not be taken lightly, calling them “Politique” and “Heretique.” Even if religious enthusiasm had overflowed into fleshly ardor leading to out of wedlock pregnancies ("la fille d’une bonnetiere en rapporta des fruits au bout de neuf mois"), devotional practices were, to be sure, becoming more serious, rigid, and violent. After the initial shock of the executions of the Guises, grief turned into anger and Henri III became the target of Parisians’ hostility:

Les nouvelles de ces meurtres et emprisonnemens venues à Paris, le samedi 24 [décembre] veuille de Noël, troublèrent bien la feste (comme l’on dit) et esmeurent estrangement la ville et le peuple, qui prist incontinent les armes et commença à faire garde exacte jour et nuit. Les Seize desploierent leurs vieux drapeaux et commencèrent à crier: *Au meurtre! au feu! au sang! et à la vengeance!* comme il advient ordinairement, en toutes seditions et revoltes, que les plus meschans font toujours le gros de la mutinerie. Puis les capitaines firent assemble leurs bourgeois par les dixaines, pour entendre leurs volontés sur ce qui estoit à faire. Chacun dit qu’il falloit employer jusques au dernier denier de la bourse et jusqu’à la dernière goutte de son sang pour venger sur le tiri (car ainsi des lors on commença à Paris d’apeler le Roy) la mort de ces deux bons Princes Lorrains. Et encore que beaucoup de gens de bien, et des premiers et principaux de la ville, fussent de contraire opinion, mesmes les premiers de la Justice, […] ils furent soudain saisi de telle apprehension et crainte que, le cœur (comme on dit) leur faillant au besoin, ils se laisserent alloer aux pernicieux conseils des meschans et mutins.86

Reactions to the Guises’ death led to revolt. The people took up arms and the Seize, the council composed of bourgeois Leaguers belonging to the sixteen quartiers of Paris, fostered discord to advance their own political agenda. Prayers for the king were banished from the canon of Mass. The king’s coat of arms was removed from the doors of the Church: “[le peuple] arracha de force les armoiries du Roy qui estoient au portail de l’eglise entre les festons de lierre, les

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desmembra, jetta au ruisseau et foula aux pieds […]“

Military processions alternated with penitential ones (see figures 4 and 5 of Appendix I, which show a comparable militarized procession of Leaguers performed two years later). Carrying the Duke of Guise’s coat of arms and the Jerusalem cross, which was the one associated with his family, captains, lieutenants, and soldiers formed their own processions, often marching side by side with other religious orders:


There can be no doubt that Paris was becoming militant and that a break had occurred between the twin powers of reenum (the temporal State) and sacerdotium (the spiritual Church). The doctrine of the Two Swords, which differentiated the powers associated with the Church and with the State, no longer applied in the same way. Henri III, divine protector of the nation and of the Catholic cause, had violated his promise to uphold justice when he ordered the execution of the Guises and the imprisonment of other nobles. The coexistence in the streets of Paris of both penitential and military processions in which Leaguers were present, reflects this gradual shift in the balance of powers. On the one hand, the influence of the Catholic Church in Paris had

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87 Ibid., 92.

88 Ibid., 146-7. See Journal de françois, bourgeois de Paris, 56-7.

89 Paul Ricoeur’s explanation of the notions onction and sanction are also fitting here to describe this shift.
reached an apex—the daily mortifications, the long processions, the prayers, as well as other acts of devotion were all signs of a heightened state of piety. On the other hand, the Leaguers and the council of Seize—all of whom were the most radical advocates for the Counter-Reformation’s cause—were gradually undermining the king’s power in Paris (and other cities throughout France), and were doing so not just by taking up arms against him and thus appropriating the temporal sword, the glaive of Justice, but also by annexing the spiritual one too.°° The political realm no longer needed the anointment of the spiritual to legitimize its sacrality (or its onction, as Paul Ricœur would say), because it had already merged with the spiritual. The Leaguers were the representatives of both the spiritual and the political in Paris. A confirmation of this displacement is visible in the processions themselves: either happening at the same time, or in close spatial and temporal proximity, both penitential and military processions ultimately represented the party of the Church and of the Leaguers. This shift in power becomes even more obvious when we take into consideration a number of other factors. On January 7, the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne decided to publish an Advis releasing (solutus) the French people from their oath of fidelity to Henri III. It was an attempt to delegitimize his authority:

Vous remonstrent humblement les bons Bourgeois manans, et habitans de la ville de Paris, que plusieurs desdits habitans et autres de ce Royaume, sont en peine et scrupule de conscience, pour prendre resolution sur les preparatifs qui se font pour la conservation de la religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine, de ceste ville de Paris, et de tout l’estat de ce Royaume, alencontre des desseins cruellement executez à Bloys, et infraction de la foy publicque au prejudice de ladite religion, et de l’édict d’Union, et de la naturelle liberté de la convocation des Estats. Surquoi lesdits supplians desireoient avoir une sainte et veritable resolution. Ce consideré, il vous plaise promouvoir que Messieurs de la faculté de Theologie soient assemblez pour deliberer sur ces pointcts, circonstances et dependances, et s’il est permis de s’assembler, s’unir et contribuer contre

°° It is important to remember that Henri III no longer had control of Paris at this time. By April, his forces were pushed back to Tours. The king had, however, conserved most of the cities in the Loire Valley (La Charité, Beaugency, Blois, Amboise, Tours, Saumur et Angers). See Nicolas Le Roux, Un régicide au nom de Dieu: l’assassinat d’Henri III (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 215-227.
This act was further legitimized by the pope’s final decisions concerning the official attitude towards the execution of the Guises. Disturbed by the rapprochement between Henri III and Henri of Navarre, the pontiff and cardinals came together to write a *monitoire*, which was published in Rome on May 24. The text threatened the king with excommunication and deposition if Henri III failed to admit that he had committed a crime by executing the Guises.

Sixtus V was particularly outraged about the death of the Cardinal of Lorraine, unprecedented for someone of such high ecclesiastical rank. According to the bull *In Coena Domini*, the execution of a cardinal *ipso facto* effectuated excommunication. If the cardinal of Lorraine had wronged the monarch, it was within the Church’s dominion to punish him and not the king’s responsibility or privilege. Henri III’s reaction to the pontiff’s claims was mixed. On the one

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91 *Advis et resolution de la Faculté de Théologie de Paris*, (n.p.: n.p., 1589), 3-6 (my emphasis). L’Estoile also mentions this publication: “[…] la Sorbonne et la Faculté de Théologie, comme portées et trompettes de la sédition, déclarent et publient, à Paris, tout le peuple et sujets de ce royaume absous du serment de fidélité et obéissance qu’ils avoient juré à Henri de Valois, naguères leur Roy, raient son nom des prières de l’Église, firent entendre à ce sot et furieux peuple qu’en saine conscience ils pouvoient s’unir, s’armer et contribuer deniers pour lui faire la guerre, comme à un tyran execrable qui avoit violé la foi publique, au notoire prejudice et contemnemment de leur sainte foi Catholique Rommaine et de l’assemblée des Estas du roiaume.” (Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. 6, 140)

92 It is important to note that, according to the Duke of Nevers, Henri III was grieved by having to ally himself with Huguenots, but that “ce quy l’a le plus faché, ça été sur cest excommuniemant.” See Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu: l’assassinat d’Henri III*, 257.

93 The pope had already excommunicated Henri of Bourbon (the future Henri IV) and Henri of Condé on September 21, 1585.

hand, we know he believed that God alone had the power to make a monarch repent, as he had already reminded his Spanish ambassador, Tassis, in 1581: “Dieu seul avoit le pouvoir de faire repentir les rois de France.” But the day after the execution of the Guises, Henri III had confessed to the canon of Saint-Sauveur de Blois, Jacques Coulomb. He had also immediately sent out a brief to his ambassador in Rome, the marquis of Pisani, and to Anne of Joyeuse, enjoining them to appease the anger of the pope by explaining his political position and the legitimacy of the execution. All of these actions had little effect. The pope had already decided that the king would be anathematized if he didn’t submit to his authority, and by the end of May, he published a bull stating that if the king failed to meet with him within ten days in order to confess his sin, he would be excommunicated:

Et comme nous attendions que ledit Roy Henry, se repentant du fait et reconnaissant sa faute, vint à recipiscence et relaschast lesdits Charles Cardinal de Bourbon et Pierre Archevesque de Lion prisonniers, et les renvoyast en pleine liberté et demandast humblement l’absolution des choses susdites. [Mais] ledit Roy Henry ne s’est soucié de nous demander ceste absolution, comme vray penitent, ny confessant sincerement son péché, ny avec telle humilité de coeur qu’il devoit, et comme Rois et Princes fideles et repentans ont fait jusques a present, […] Que si le susdit Roy Henry n’obeit à ces nostres paternelles exhortations, monitions et requisitions et mandement, et que dans les dix jours susdits, [nous serons forcés de prendre des mesures contre lui]. Nous disons, prononçons et declarons des à present, […] que le dit Roy Henry et tous et chacun de ceux qui ont été coupables, complices et fauteurs en ceste notoire violante main-mise, capture emprisonnement, detention et massacre susdits, ou qui y ont donné, apporté et presenté conseil, aide, confort, la main et ministre […] ont damnablement encouru, et sont tombez en sentence d’excommunication majeure, et au lieu d’anathême et autres censures Ecclesiastiques, contenues et promulguées aux susdits sacrez canons et constitutions […] Et declarons et denonçons à tous fidèles Chrestiens publiquement et devant tous luy et

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96 For more information on the details of the pope’s reaction to Henri III, see chapter twelve of Nicolas Le Roux’s *Un régicide au nom de Dieu : l’assassinat d’Henri III* and pages 685-694 of Pierre Chevallier’s biography, *Henri III, roi shakespearien*. 

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eux estre excommuniez et retranchez de l’union du corps de Jesus Christ […] 97

The language of the bull is revealing: penance becomes an outright political weapon. Although angry with Henri III about the Cardinal’s death, the pontiff had, in fact, been indecisive for a while about whether or not he should take sides with the Holy League against the king. His indecision ceased when Henri III allied himself with Henri of Navarre. In the end, for the pontiff, it did not seem to matter whether or not the king was forced into this alliance with the Huguenots out of necessity, or because the Leaguers were at war with him. Sixtus V had his own priorities, and using the bull *In Coena Domini* against the king enabled him to promote his own political agenda. Some of his political motives became clearer during the meetings he had with Henri III’s ambassadors in early January: after having resigned themselves to the fact that they wouldn’t be able to assuage the pope’s anger over the death of the Guises and over the imprisonment of several important clergymen, the marquis of Pisani and Anne of Joyeuse hinted to Henri III that, “*en guise de pénitence,*” Henri III would not only most likely have to release the cardinal, Charles of Bourbon, and Pierre of Epinac, the bishop of Lyon (both fervent Leaguers), but that he might also have to ratify the decrees of the Council of Trent, and perhaps even introduce the Inquisition in France. 98 The publication of the bull, it seems, was thus not without its own ulterior motives. The penance of Henri III implied, in fact, much more than a simple confession of sin, it would become a point of contention in public and political debates even after the king’s death.

Particularly remarkable, in the strategy adopted by the pope in the time leading to the


publication of the bull, are the ways in which penance appears as an entirely dominating political concept in the affairs of the state. Without a doubt, Sixtus V’s political power hinged on a careful control of the modalities of repentance: he understood well that whoever could impose it, also assigned guilt, and therefore, had true political authority. The pontiff’s demand that Henri III confess to him in person in Rome, outside of France’s territory, was a clever way of undermining the king’s power. He knew very well that Henri III could not possibly leave France, since it would have been taking too great a risk in a context of civil war. Henri III was at the center of a power struggle that left him with very little room to maneuver: if he refused to repent, he would be condemned as a tyrant; however, if he submitted to the pontiff’s will by admitting his guilt, he would most assuredly fall prey to even more ferocious attacks against his authority. To be sure, as a theological and political concept, penance served as a means of fragilizing political legitimacy, both at the national and the international level.

No matter how detrimental the threat of excommunication was to Henri III, it was not, however, as menacing as the danger of deposition. Although the Sorbonne’s Advis and the pope’s bull of anathema affected Henri III’s spiritual authority, they also changed his political authority. Beyond the threat of banishment from the Church, these attacks from theological authorities opened up the possibility of new types of justification for popular revolt. Theoretical legitimizations of resistance to the monarch, of course, already existed at this point in France’s history. In the 1570s, Huguenot texts justifying tyrannicide, even if they had been criticized, were well known: the Monarchomachs wrote a number of works that problematized the notion of unconditional obedience, examined theories of sovereignty, and expounded new ideas regarding the social contract. Jean de Coras’s Question politique (1568?), François Hotman’s Francogallia (1573), Eusèbe Philadelphe’s Réveille-Matin des François
(1574), Théodore de Bèze’s *Le Droit des magistrats* (1574), or Brutus’s *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579) reflect this preoccupation. In 1572, after the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, the Monarchomachs’ ideas acquired increasing importance for Protestants as they struggled to align their consciences with Charles IX’s politics, which fed religious intolerance and violence. To be sure, the religious wars fragilized their allegiance to him, and for many, political obedience had now reached its limit.

In 1584, after the death of Henri III’s brother, Francis, the Duke of Alençon, the last Valois heir to the throne, Leaguers also began to espouse some of the Monarchomachs’ theories, albeit for their own political purposes. The social contract and the question of legitimate political power were at the center of their interests. Salic law, for instance, became one of the central issues in their debates around Henri of Navarre (the future Henri IV) who was heir-presumptive to the crown. Many believed that the fundamental law should be abrogated since it allowed a Protestant to ascend to the throne. “*Un roi, une loi, une foi*” eventually became the Leaguers’ motto as they emphasized the supremacy of the Catholic faith over hereditary succession. Leaguers also began to question the limits of a prince’s power: if a king were to become a tyrant or a heretic, were his subjects obliged to keep their oath of obedience to him? If a prince had “unlawfully” put to death a subject without due process or judgment, was his authority still legitimate? These questions are evidently of particular importance here, because the Leaguers were clearly questioning Henri III’s own political actions after the execution of the Guises. Monarchomach theories gave them the theoretical framework with which to affirm their own

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beliefs, as well as the discursive tools necessary to condemn the actions of the king. Henri III could now be openly accused of tyranny, which he was in fact, as the pamphlets and *pasquils* published during this period attest. Injurious portraits of the monarch were found in many of these texts, which bore titles such as *De la difference du roy et du tyran*, *Avertissement des nouvelles cruautez et inhumanitez desseignées par le Tyran de la France*, and *De justa reipublicae christianae in reges impios et haereticos auctoritate* (this last text was written by the notorious Leaguer, the bishop of Senlis, Guillaume Rose). They compared Henri III to a variety of figures associated with tyrannical power, such as Machiavelli, the wicked Herod, the prideful Nebuchadnezzar, the cruel Nero, the traitor Judas, and so forth—the list could easily be

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extended. Jean Boucher, one of the most radical clergymen of the League, was among the authors condemning the monarch, penning texts such as *De la juste abdication du roi Henri III*, *La Vie et faits notables de Henry de Valois*, and *Le faux-visage descouvert du fin Renard de la France*. The latter pamphlet decried the king, describing him not only as the “fils aîné de satan” and as a “renard” whose duplicitous identity had now been revealed (“descouvert”), but also as a tyrant in a monk’s disguise, which brings us back to the question of repentance:

Ce meurtier de Princes a joué deux rolets / comme un farceur de boufon sur l’eschafaut de France, / Sous le peau du Renard, avec belle apparence, / Portant à son costé de ces gros chapellets: et un grand manteau gris flottant sur ses jarrets / et la barbe razée: ayant changé de chance, / Soubs le cuir du Lyon boursouflé de vengence, / S’enivre du beau sang de deux Princes immortels.\(^{103}\)

\[…\]
Icy tu vois Henry le dehors tres-pieux,
Mais le dedans recelle à la France des feux.\(^{104}\)

The depiction of Henri III as a monk or a hermit is part of the intricate context accompanying the penitential processions. Since at least 1576, the king had been compared to monkish figures. In one of the *pasquils* that L’Estoile collected during the summer of 1576, the king is derided for his hypocritical adoption of the ascetic values of the hermit in order to obtain money for his pleasures: “Le roi pour avoir de l’argent a fait le pauvre et l’indigent et l’hypocrite. Le grand


\(^{102}\) Jean Boucher, in fact, published *De la juste abdication du roi Henri III* shortly after the assassination of the king, but it was written earlier, as Boucher himself states in the epilogue dedicated to Jacques Clément, the assassin of Henri III.


pardon, il a gagné, au pain, à l’eau il a jeûné comme un ermite.”

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the king was also mocked for wearing a “sac du pénitent” during the procession of the congregation of the Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame on March 25, 1583:

After having pillaged France
And all his people plundered,
Is this not a beautiful penance
To cover oneself with a wet sack?

Attacking the king’s piety by referring to the sackcloth he wore on his face during the procession, soaked through by the rain, is a recurrent trope. The same “sac du pénitent” was also comically compared to the garb of an apiculturist tending his honeybees, since it covered the entire head and had only two slits for the eyes. Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet, in his Chronologie Novevaire, referring to the year 1586, gave a political interpretation of the portraits that circulated depicting the king as an apiculturist:

[Les portraits] habilloient [le roi] en Penitent ostant le miel et la cire d’une ruche, avec ces mots: Sic eorum aculeos evito. Ils vouloient dire que, comme il se faut couvrir la face et les mains de quelque sac quand on veut oster le miel d’une ruche, de peur d’estre picqué de l’esguillon des mouches, ainsi que le Roy se couvroit la face d’un sac de Penitent de peur des esguillons de la ligue.

Now, years later, in the aftermath of the death of the Guises, the characterizations of the king as a hermit or a monk took on a whole new import. The negative associations with different

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religious figures symbolizing the disconnection from the worldly realm implied that his authority was no longer operative and that he was a king without a sword. This image became one of the major polemical focal points used to undermine his authority. For instance, one of the dominant images of Henri III was to compare him to Chilperic I (539-584), the Merovingian king from Soissons, who was considered the Nero or Herod of his age:

[...] lors qu’on parloit du Roy, comme d’un Sardanaple, d’un paynant d’un Prince enyvré du luxe, et des dissolutions, que desjà on le releguoit comme un Chilperic en un Monastere, et au lieu de la troisisme Couronne que sa devise luy donnoit au Ciel, on luy en promettoit une avec le rasoir en un Cloistre. 108

[...] on parlait desja combien de temps on le laisseroit vivre en un Cloistre, qu’on avoit desja monstré les ciseaux qui le razeroyent pour le tondre, et encoffrer en un Monastere, comme Childeric, qu’on disoit que le rasoir feroit la dernier couronne, de trois qu’il se promettoit par sa devise [...]. 109

Although these passages contain a few historical inaccuracies (it wasn’t Chilperic who was deposed and tonsured, but his son, Mérovée, in 576), the comments are revealing.110 The most effective punishment for the king would be to shut him away in a monastery and to make him

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110 The five-year-old son of Chilpéric, named Childebert, is another possibility, since he had also been threatened of being placed in a monastery. However, it seems more likely that it is Mérovée since he was actually deposed.
repent for the rest of his life for his political sins. Similarly to Chilperic I (in fact Mérovée), Henri III should also be tonsured and placed in a cloister. Just as the loss of hair for the Franks, according to Michel Rouche, implied the forfeiture of one’s right to rule and a loss of sacrality, Henri III’s newly shaved head would also signal the end of his reign.111 Pierre Matthieu, who started as a Leaguer before supporting Henri IV, thus summarized Henri III’s situation in his Histoire des derniers troubles de France: “Plus capable d’un sac que d’un Sceptre,”112 the king was the “ennemy de son peuple, non Roy, mais Tyran de son Royaume, et […] le peuple conclut sur le champ à l’enfermer en un Cloistre.”113 The jeu de mot on Henri III’s royal motto in the passages above—manet ultima coelo (“the ultimate crown remains in heaven”)—is also revealing because it not only desacralizes the person of the king, but also casts him entirely out of society, removing him from government and depriving him of regal authority: the “new” crown the king will wear—rendered visible by the tonsured bald spot on the top of his head—will be one of penance and punishment.

Penance had indeed become such an important political concept that even the superior of the Feuillant order, Dom Bernard de Montgaillard, with whom the king had initially had a friendly relationship in previous years, was now taking sides with Leaguers. In June of 1589, he enjoined the king to renounce his scepter by embracing the virtues of penance. According to him, it was the monarch’s only hope of attaining true redemption:

[Dieu] vous ouvre le chemin royal de la penitence pour vous relever. […] Dieu vous a favorisé par dessus les autres hommes, vous serez un rang à part, pour souffrir un plus


112 Matthieu, Histoire des derniers troubles de France, sous les règnes des rois, 216r.

113 Ibid., 195v-196r.
rigoureux examen, et plus dure punition estant trouvé coulpable, que nul des autres. […] Que la connoissance de vostre peril vous espouvante, et l’espouventement vous excite et mette des ailes à vos pieds pour vous sauver de vistesse au port de la saincte penitence […] imitez la reconnoissance de ce Roy Assyrien [Nabuchadnazzer], lequel s’humilia devant la majesté de Dieu […] recourez au deuil et aux larmes de la penitence: prosternez vous devant la Majesté de Dieu, commençant de l’appaiser par une volontaire et entiere renonciation du sceptre, duquel vous avez tant abusé, pour y estres pourveu par les Estats de la France, de quelque juste, vertueux et Catholique Prince, mette la main et travaille à bon escient à reparer les ruines que vous y avez faites,[…] Ceste renonciation estant acte de grand effort, et d’un haute et difficile resolution, sera une grande partie de vostre satisfaction envers Dieu […] A quoy pour faire une parfaite penitence adjouzterez l’abnegation et renoncement de vostre propre volonté et liberté en espousant le sainct estat de religion en quelque sainct monastere. […] Et là mettez vostre ame comme dans la fournaise d’une saincte mortification, pour la refondre et renouveller […] 114

A member of the Feuillants, a reformed Cistercian order that emphasized austerity, mortification, and penance, dom Bernard would have already been inclined to suggest such a remedy for Henri III’s soul, since he was already a strong advocate of repentance. However, the fact that the Feuillant includes the deposition of the king as one of the key criteria in the king’s penance suggests that his personal take on the political situation changed what his religious attitude towards the king’s alleged sins would normally have been. 115 Hidden behind the mask of a friendly Christian remonstrance is a Leaguer’s agenda, and it is precisely the concept of penance that serves as the driving political force in imagining Henri III’s deposition.

Ridding France of Henri III by locking him away in a cloister and barring him from

114 Bernard de Montgaillard, Response de domp Bernard Doyen de l’Oratoire de Sainct Bernard des Feuillans lez Paris, à une lettre a lu escrite et envoyee par Henry de Valois. (Lengres, de l’imprimerie de M. Jean Tabouret demourant devant la grande Eglise, 1589), 18. 29. 131-133 (My emphasis). There are other examples of interventions in which the king is summoned to repent before God. In Le vray portrait d’un homme lequel apparu à Henry de Valois, dedans le Chasteau de Blois, a strange apparition appeared before the king that called for him to repent and reform himself: “Penitenciam Agite […] Henry de Valois amende toy, / Les ames crient vengeance apres toy.” (Les Belles Figures et drolleries de la Ligue, ed. Gilbert Schrenck, Genève: Droz, 2016, 83-84.)

115 Dom Bernard de Percin de Montgaillard, also called the “petit Feuillant,” little by little became an adamant Leaguer, preaching against both Henri III and Henri IV. After the surrender of Paris in 1594, he fled to Flanders along with other radical Leaguers. Jean de La Barrière, on the contrary, would remain loyal to Henri III even at the risk of his own life. See Michel Simonin, “Montaigne et les Feuillants,” Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France, 97e année, No. 4 (Jul.-Aug., 1997), 523-549.
public view and public office is clearly a harsh measure; however, the animosity expressed towards the king at that time was nothing compared to what it would become later. A more drastic change was occurring in the public’s attitude as the winter months passed and spring arrived. In the early months, without a doubt, destructive acts had occurred, which involved, for instance, smashing some of the monuments that Henri III had erected for his reputation and posterity: on January 2, 1589, Parisians demolished the “sepulchres et figures de marbre que le Roy avoir fait eriger, aupres du grant autel de l’Eglise S. Pol.” Soon, the monarch became the target of many more serious and personal acts of violence: he now found himself the object of a series of symbolic regicides. In February, a portrait of the king was seized from an Augustinian monastery and burned. In July, the Franciscan Cordeliers removed “la teste à la representation de la figure du Roy, qui estoit peint à genoux […] au dessus du maistre autel de leur eglise.” In a similar fashion, the Dominicans blotted out the faces of the king painted in their cloister, and a lawyer in the Cour of Parlement named Pierre Versoris, even smashed the portrait of the king into pieces when he heard the news of the Guises’ deaths (“[…] aiant prist


117 See chapter 8 of Nicolas Le Roux’s Un régicide au nom de Dieu: l’assassinat d’Henri III.

118 “[… ] le dit jour, feut aussy arraché ung grand tableau où estoit despainct cest excommunié tirand avec ses coquins, belastres et satellites de mignons, lequel estoit despainct comme il estoit en son pontificat lorsqu’il faisot son ordre de chevallier du Saint-Esprit, lequel tableau estoit attaché derrière et au-dessus du maistre-hostel du couvent et monastère des Augustins ; et feut icelluy tableau bruslé […]” (Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris, 64)

119 L’Estoile, Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III, vol. 6, 198. “Ce jour, les Cordeliers osterent la teste à la representation de la figure du Roy, qui estoit peint à genoux, priant Dieu auprès de la Roine sa femme, au dessus du maistre autel de leur eglise. Et aux Jacobins, estant peint de ceste façon en leurs cloistres, ils barbouillèrent et lui chaffourrèrent tout le visage. Belle occupation et amusement de gens qui n’ont que faire, et ouvrage, disoit on, digne de moine.” (Ibid., 198)
Paris was not the only city to express this kind of symbolic violence against the king. In Toulouse, people were also performing violent acts against the images and effigies of the monarch:

[…] les dits habitans feirent l’effigie et pourtraicture et puys icelle pendirent et en après la traisnèrent à la queue d’un cheval par toutes les rues de la dite ville en démonstration de l’horreur qu’ilz avoient de l’assassinat commis et perpétré par ce mauldict et excommunié tyran envers et ès personnes de messieurs les cardinal et duc de Guyse, premiers pilliers de la foy chrestienne.

Concomitant with this new emphasis on symbolic violence towards the king was the development of a number of penitential acts. In a procession to the church of Sainte-Geneviève-au-Mont-de-Paris, for instance, children in the cortege snuffed out the candles they were holding during the ceremony, cast them upon the ground, and trampled them, as if their gesture would efface the king’s lineage:

[…] à l’entrée de laquelle église les dits petitz enfans, tant fils que filles, qui estoient nombre environ cent mil, jectoient leur chandelle à leur piedz et marchoient dessus en signe que ce maudit tirand estoit excommunié et crioient tout hault ce qui ensuient [lacuna in the manuscript].

Although the manuscript was left unfinished and we do not know what the writer of Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris would have written here, in another text, entitled the Abrégé de l’histoire de Henry III, roy de France et de Pologne, the archdeacon of Toul, Machon, gives us an idea: “On fit des processions à pieds nus où les enfans portoient des cierges allumés qui, en les éteignant, disoient ainsi: Dieu permette qu’en bref la race des Valois soit entièrement

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120 Ibid., 92. According to L’Estoile, Pierre Versoris was so upset about the news of the Guises’ deaths that he died a few hours later.

121 Journal de François, bourgeois de Paris, 67.

122 Ibid., 25.
This example of the fantasized extinguishing of the Valois lineage was not isolated. Other penitential processions provided occasions for different forms of symbolic regicides. At the end of January, people in several Churches throughout Paris made waxed images of the king specifically in order to prick them during Mass for forty straight days. On the fortieth day, they pierced the image in the heart. But they also marched in processions allegedly carrying “magic” candles and chanting incantations they believed would bring about the king’s death:

Ils firent faire à Paris force images de cire qu’ils tenoient sur l’autel et les piquoient à chacune des quarante messes qu’ils firent durant 40 jours en plusieurs paroisses de Paris et à la quarantiesme piquoient l’image à l’endroit du coeur, disans à chaque pique quelque parole de magie ou sorcellerie pour essayer de faire mourir le Roy. Aux processions pareillement et pour le mesme effect ils portoient certains cierges magiques qu’ils appelloient par moquerie des cierges benis qu’ils faisoient esteindre aux lieux où ils alloient renverser la lumiere contre bas disans je ne sais quelles paroles que des sorciers qui se moquoient d’eux leur avoient appris et donné à entendre qu’elles avoient grande vertu à faire mourir les rois. Le Diable se moquant de ceste façon de la sotte credulité et rebellion de ce peuple.¹²⁴

Even if L’Estoile criticized these religious acts and considered them to be the product of popular superstition and ignorance, the point remains that penitential processions clearly served as a political weapon in the conflict against Henri III. Along with a range of other actions and discourses, they functioned as a powerful instrument in the desacralization of his person and the destabilization of his authority.

Whatever the angle we choose to examine the progression of the enmity expressed towards the monarch, it is clear that he had become a scapegoat, a pharmakos, accused of the ills plaguing France. Even more telling, however, is the fact that in all of these moments when the king was symbolically put to death, we also see the traces of the religious festival of Carnival.

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¹²⁴ L’Estoile, *Registre-Journal du règne de Henri III*, vol. 6, 139-140. (My emphasis)
During Mardi Gras, straw mannequins and puppets representing the devil, for instance, were also symbolically sacrificed.\(^\text{125}\) The resemblance between the symbolic regicides of Henri III and the carnivalesque act of putting to death a scapegoat is striking. In both cases, the sacrifice of the “victim” could be understood as a means to restore the community. The sacrifice of Carnival was, as it is often noted, a liberating rite that inaugurated a new season. It purified. It was a gesture of rebirth and regeneration. To some extent, the symbolic executions of Henri III bear a resemblance to this kind of regenerative destruction: the violence expressed towards him undoubtedly had an expiatory function. It was only with the death of the king—with the extermination of the “Antichrist,” as many Parisians believed him to be—that order could be restored in France and God’s wrath appeased. The imagined execution of the king had a cathartic effect. But the true liberation could only occur with the death of the real king—not a puppet representing him. As Denis Crouzet and other historians have shown, the assassination of Henri III on August 2, 1589 by Jacques Clément indeed brought joy and exhilaration to a great majority of Parisians:

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\ldots \text{la ville sort subitement d’un temps d’affliction pour entrer dans un temps au cours duquel le sentiment de la délivrance se traduit par une exubérance collective : les Parisiens passent leur journée à “courir” par les rues, de maison en maison, certains se rendent dans les églises. Le soir, des feux de joie brûlent aux carrefours où des tables sont installées […] Les visages se libèrent soudain de l’empreinte pénitentiellement affligée et angoissée. […] les ligueurs, les “conjurés” selon L’Estoile, retirent les écharpes noires qu’ils portaient depuis la fin décembre en signe d’affliction personnelle, pour arborer désormais des écharpes vertes que madame de Montpensier leur fait distribuer. Une représentation de la vie qui reprend le dessus la mort.}\(^\text{126}\)
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Before the actual death of Henri III, the staged symbolic regicides functioned as a kind of tribunal. They represented the collective judgment expressed against the monarch: the people,


who had imagined and interiorized this regicide, were punishing the king for his crimes. Their acts served as a kind of exorcism: they attempted to “cleanse” France of the affliction that plagued it. When the Jacobin assassinated Henri III at Saint-Cloud, many believed that God had answered their prayers.

No matter how liberating these acts of symbolic regicide might have been, the need to purify France by means of a scapegoat was, in fact, symptomatic of higher theological-political stakes. The doctrines on tyrannicide were linked to the Counter-Reformation’s desire for religious unification. As Denis Crouzet notes, with the death of Henri III, the Holy League (the Sainte Union) had in fact succeeded, as the name of its party suggests, in its goal of unifying the nation with God, even if its victory was short-lived:

S’assembler en l’Union, c’est n’être plus qu’UN, exister spirituellement en Dieu, rejoindre Dieu en ce que le Père et le fils ne sont qu’Un. Il est assuré que “L’Union vient d’en haut de l’autorité et puissance de Dieu.” L’Union des catholiques, institution divine, est donc unité des hommes en Dieu […]. La miséricorde de Dieu a été la venue de Un […]. L’Union est une conformité spirituelle de prière et d’action de tous les fidèles de Dieu dans la Loi de Dieu, qui rend chaque homme participant de Dieu dans l’adhésion à l’ordre universel […].

The problem with this desire for religious unification was that it led Leaguers and their followers to become more intransigent and militant in their advocacy of the Catholic faith: cleansing France of Henri III was part of a larger attempt to exterminate those who did not conform to the doctrine and politics of the Holy League. The extirpation and expulsion of Protestants, heretics, and Politiques appeared to be the condition of realization of the Union in God. The Politiques were imprisoned, their houses searched, and their money confiscated. Members of the

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Parliament, whose opinions differed too much from that of the Seize, were also imprisoned and often only released after having paid a handsome ransom. Ministers continued to seek the destruction of Protestantism and its followers. To be sure, the desire for religious unification had clearly reached new heights. It was dividing Parisian society into two groups—those who identified with the Holy League and those who did not. Anyone whose ideas threatened their doctrine, risked expulsion, imprisonment, and even death.

Although a number of other factors led to this theocratic shift in French politics at the end of Henri III’s reign, penitential processions and discourses played a key role in this change. They represent one of the major ways in which religious intolerance was exacerbated in Paris and other cities around France. The processions served to facilitate the reactivation of Counter-reformation politics in general. Repentance, in fact, became one of the main theological concepts pervading the political sphere, as we have seen in the numerous examples that showed its extension into the body politic. At this point in our development, it seems clear that, after the death of the Guises, a new political discourse on penance had emerged: repentance was no longer simply an act of contrition, but it now served as God’s glaive itself. It was the sword of justice used to punish the king. The penitential processions of Leaguers and Parisians were, to be sure, a psychological means of dealing with the trauma of the Guises’ deaths, but they were also an outward manifestation of revolt against the king. Penance was one of the main religious practices used to admonish the king: it was a theological and political weapon. Whether they were conscious of it or not, the people of Paris and the Leaguers had appropriated these practices in

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129 Ibid., 155-157.

order to sway the course of politics and unify the Catholic Church. The penitential procession to Chartres after the Day of Barricades was most likely the first sign of this change in the politicization of repentance: what appeared to be a carnivalesque and subversive penitential procession was the first indicator of this “arming” of penance against the king, which would then go on to have its own political force during the winter and spring of 1589.

The Afterlife of Penance: the Political Representations Surrounding the Death of Henri III

With the disappearance of the king, one could have expected that penance, because it had become such an idiosyncratic feature of his style of government, would have lost some of its currency. What we see, however, is precisely the opposite: a new discourse on penance proliferated, as if the past couldn’t pass. No longer roaming the streets in penitential processions, the king came back as a spectral figure, haunting many of the pamphlets and pasquils that circulated in Paris at the time. Reading them, we see that penance not only continued to obsess...
the political imagination of Leaguers, but that Henri III served as an indispensable foil to imagine and articulate the concept with new theological-political force, in a way that would actually determine the reception of his life and reign. Thus, rather than fading after the disappearance of its most illustrious proponent, penance now transformed into a political tool serving the aims of those who had most actively opposed the king. It is as if the penitential bent that he had contributed to give to the political struggles of this time now continued independently of his will and the control of others—Henri III had succeeded in placing repentance at the center of politics, even if it meant that it would now be used against his memory.

Although some pamphlets and oraisons funèbres—such as the Derniers propos du roy, consolant avant sa mort ses fidelis sujets, or the Tombeau du roy, avec les pleurs et lamentations de sa mort—commemorated Henri III, praising his accomplishments and lamenting his disappearance, the majority of texts written after his death were fraught with condemnations and
If Henri III had struggled to restore royal dignity during his lifetime and had fought against his growing unpopularity, his assassination by Jacques Clément on August 1, 1589 (see figure 6) seemed to have rendered such efforts futile. Only the most ardent Royalists and the queen, Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, earnestly tried to restore his reputation. Without a doubt, Leaguers were the political party that had the most to rejoice over for in the king’s death. Immediately following his assassination, they exalted his assassin in writings that played a key role in the further desacralization and vilification of the king. According to Pierre Victor Palma Cayet, Leaguers claimed that God himself had sent an angel to Clément in order to


133 Other writers certainly also wrote about the king’s death. Pierre de l’Estoile, for instance, described it as a sign of the political instability in France: “Ce Roy, mourant, laissa le roiaume de France et tous les subjets d’icelui si pauvres, attenés et debilités, qu’on en pouvoit plus tost attendre la ruine qu’en espere aucune rescousse. Et ce autant ou plus par leur fautes ou rebellions que par defaut suffit seul pour ternir toutes ses vertus. Il en posseda une sur-tout dans un dégré éminent; ce fut la libéralité; et cette vertu, qui dans les autres Princes fait l’admiration des hommes, fut fatale à ce Monarque, qui ne sçut pas lui donner des bornes, et qui, pour satisfaire à ses profusions d’inventer chaque jour de nouveaux impôts, se rendit enfin odieux à ses sujets, sans en être plus aimé de ceux qu’il accabloit de biens, et qui attribuoient plutôt ses bienfaits à son naturel prodigue qu’à aucun sentiment de reconnaissance ou d’esprit qu’on peut désirer dans un grand Monarque, un attachement sincere pour la Religion de ses pères, beaucoup de zèle pour la justice, une prudence consommée, un air majestueux joint à une douceur et une bonté sans exemple. On ne put lui reprocher que trop de penchant pour la mollesse et pour les plaisirs; et de défaut suffit seul pour ternir toutes ses vertus. Il en posseda une sur-tout dans un dégré éminent; ce fut la libéralité; et cette vertu, qui dans les autres Princes fait l’admiration des hommes, fut fatale à ce Monarque, qui ne sçut pas lui donner des bornes, et qui, pour satisfaire à ses profusions d’inventer chaque jour de nouveaux impôts, se rendit enfin odieux à ses sujets, sans en être plus aimé de ceux qu’il accabloit de biens, et qui attribuoient plutôt ses bienfaits à son naturel prodigue qu’à aucun sentiment de reconnaissance ou d’estime qu’il eût pour eux. L’épuisement de ses finances, la perte de l’amitié de son peuple, l’affection de certaines pratiques de dévotion, plus dignes du petit peuple et d’un Moine que d’un grand Roi, le rendirent méprisable à ses sujets, et firent naître aux ennemis du dedans et du dehors également attentifs à profiter de nos malheurs, le dessin d’allumer le trouble et la division en France. [...] Jamais Prince n’avoit donné de si belles espérances; et jamais Roi n’y répondit si mal.” (De Thou, Histoire Universelle, op. cit., 491) Interestingly, De Thou’s descriptions of Henri III’s weaknesses or flaws, which stemmed in part from his liberality and devotional practices, echo, at least to some extent, those of Leaguers. The monarch’s desire to participate in penitential ceremonies and other public acts of piety were a sign of the king’s general misunderstanding of his role as sovereign ruler.
entreat him to accomplish his regicide:

[...] les ligueurs ou ceux de l’union [...] ont publié que Dieu mesmes l’avoit commandé par un ange, et qu’une nuict, Jacques Clément estant en son lict, Dieu luy envoya son ange en vision, lequel avec grande lumiere se presenta à luy, et luy monstra un glaive nud, lui disant ces mots : “Frere Jacques, je suis messager de Dieu tout-puissant, qui te viens acertener que par toy le tyran de France doit estre mis à mort ; pense donc à toy comme la couronne de martire t’est aussi preparée.”\textsuperscript{134}

A sketch of a procession that had been held in front of Notre-Dame in honor of Clément reveals the extent of the Jacobin’s prestige in Paris: he represented, as Denis Crouzet noted, the “force de Dieu.”\textsuperscript{135} The death of the king was an answer to the Leaguers’ prayers: “Si jamais on eu occasion de louër nostre bon Dieu, et de faire paroistre la reconnoissance qu’on luy doit, c’est à

\textsuperscript{134} Pierre-Victore Palma Cayet, \textit{Chronologie novénaire}, 151-152; Palma Cayet is quoting, almost word for word, the pamphlet, \textit{Discours veritable de l’estrange et subite mort de Henry de Valois par permission divine, luy estant a S. Clou, ayant assiége la Ville de Paris, le Mardy 1. Jour d’Aoust, 1589. Par un Religieux de l’ordre des Jacobins}, (Troyes: Jean Moreau, M. Imprimeur pres Nostre Dame), 1589.

present, qu’il nous a osté nostre plus grand ennemy, voire de son Eglise et de toute la Chrestienté [...].”

Yet, if Leaguers considered the “estrange et subite mort de Henry de Valois” a “bonne nouvelle,” their interpretation and perspective of it changed as the weeks passed. Past a period of joy and elation which, more pressing matters arising, could have led to the gradual forgetting of the ill-fated monarch, renewed attacks were made against him, as if he could not stay buried and continued to trouble the city. Marked by lingering ill will and bitterness, pamphlets focusing in part on the Valois’s last moments and afterlife appeared. One of the questions they asked was whether or not he had repented or showed remorse in his last moments. What had happened during his deathbed confession? What had been God’s final Judgment of him? Leaguers, evidently, were interested in portraying his death as a punishment from God and naturally adopted related lieux communs to depict his assassination. It was, for instance, commonly understood that if an individual had experienced a strange and unconventional death—a particularly gory or painful one—it was a sure sign that he had been the victim of God’s wrath. A prince was not exempt from such belief in divine justice. In fact, because he was God’s chosen ruler, and his obedience to divine law must be faultless, he could endure a harsher punishment and a more terrifying death than his subjects. Leaguers instrumentalized this common cultural belief, making use of mytho-historic references in order to give meaning to the king’s last moments. In Effects espouventables de l’excommunication de Henry de Valois, et de Henry de

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137 Ibid.
Navarre, où est contenu du vray l'histoire de la mort de Henry de Valois, the fantasized figure of Chilperic I reappeared, who we have already crossed as an important model for thinking about Henri III’s penance and deposition:

Chilperic le Neron et Herode de nostre siecle, vint Cheles, distant de Paris environ cent stades, là il prend son plaisir à chasser. Mais un jour retournant sur le tard de la chasse; comme il descendoit de cheval; s’appuyant d’une main sur l’espaule d’un sien serviteur, receut par un certain qui lors survint un coup de cousteau sous l’aisselle, et un autre dans le ventre, et soudainement le sang sortant en abondance par la bouche; et par les playes; rendit son ame malheureuse. Ce que nous avons cy dessus escrit de luy, monstre combien il s’est meschamment comporté.

Placed at the beginning of the pamphlet, this reference to the Merovingian king clearly serves as a comparative exemplum. Henri III, it was suggested, had a lot in common with Chilperic I, who had been deposed, tonsured, placed in a cloister, and finally stabbed with a dagger as a punishment for his iniquities. Other pamphlets focused on the details of the stabbing. The Discours veritable de l’estrange et subite mort de Henry de Valois par permission divine described Clément’s assault on Henri III as being so forceful that the latter’s bowels had spilled out of his abdomen: “[il] luy donne tel coup dans le ventre, que les boyaux en sortoient avec le sang en grande effusion.” If the pamphleteer focuses on the insides of the king, it is because the base and vile parts of his body represent the corruptions and impurities of his soul leaving his body. Clément’s dagger cutting through Henri III, opening up the interior, functions here as a kind of truth-revealing weapon, in what resembles a “forced confession.” We are here reminded of Erasmus’s adage on the Sileni Alcibiadis and of his development on the silène inversé, the inside-out Silenus: unlike Socrates, who was ugly on the outside and beautiful on the inside, false Sileni are men—often in power—who hide under the cloak of piety, charity, and prudence.

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If you were to open up one of these inside-out Sileni, you would find nothing but tyrants, despots, and men of war. Clément’s violent gesture, as it is imagined in the pamphlets, is not far from offering a violent and literal version of Erasmus’s gesture of unveiling. This depiction bears of course no connection to the real unfolding of the murder—by more reliable accounts, the king’s innards did not fall out of his abdomen—and only reflects the Leaguers’ theological and political motivations in imagining a particularly gruesome and painful death for Henri III. The king’s sufferings served as “proof” of his guilt and implied that he had deserved his fate: God had revealed, by His very punishment, the Valois’s true nature.\[139\]

Leaguers were not solely interested in interpreting the moment of the stabbing. From a propagandist’s point of view, showing how the king had allegedly held himself as he lay dying also carried significant political and theological potential. In *Les derniers propos de Henry de Valois, jadis roy et Tyran de France*, Henri III’s face and body were described as displaying all the signs of his true wickedness, now impossible to contain and repress:

[... ] son visage devint rouge, enflammé et fort hideux à voir et ne pouvant plus parler (quelque remonstrances que le Cardinal de Gondy luy fist), il demeura sept heures en agonie avec les plus effroyables regards, battement de mains, et grincements de dents qui ayent jamais esté veuz. Enfin le Mercredy sur les deux heures du matin il rendit l’esprit, au grand regret du Roy de Navarre, de d’Espernon et autres qui l’avoyent assisté en ses meschantes deliberations.\[140\]

Henri III’s hideous and flaming red face, his inability to speak, his frightful glances, shaking hands, and grinding teeth confirmed his guilt in the eyes of the Leaguers. The truth about the

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king’s soul was revealed, as if his “possessed” body, almost become devilish, were proof of his ineradicable sinfulness.\textsuperscript{141} Crucial for our topic is the fact that such descriptions were intended to depict the king as impenitent. Such an extraordinary and painful death meant that the prince must have been incorrigible, tyrannical, and unrepentant, since only a truly obdurate and wicked sinner would have been punished so harshly by God.

In order to understand the full political and theological import of these descriptions, one must also read them in conjunction with the imagined deathbed confessions of the king. To be sure, before his assassination at the hand of Clément, a few pamphlets had been published, which described a Machiavellian version of Henri III admitting to having planned the murder of the Guises. Such texts focused on demonstrating the tyranny of the monarch in order to subvert his political authority, justify his possible deposition, and, in some cases, call for a tyrannicide (since the king himself admitted to his cruelty, he could be justifiably put to death).\textsuperscript{142} The king’s confessions, as they were fictionalized in pamphlets after his death, were of a different nature. Although they were pleased with his assassination, Leaguers wanted more. By publicising what they claimed had been the king’s last words, they desired to bring to light the truth about his conscience. Did he know that he was a sinner? Did he feel guilty? Did he express remorse? Bent

\textsuperscript{141} In Les prophéties merveilleuses advenues à l’endroit de Henry de Valois, another description of the king’s face is given, which, although it is not referring to his deathbed, has a similar resonance: “[…] son visage est devenu plus noir que les charbons, faisant choses abominables, don’t le ciel en soit estonné, la terre tremble et tremisse, la mer entre en furie, et l’air soit tout couvert de nüage et se cache, qui sera celuy aui ne recognoistra qu’il doit estre appellé fils aisé de Sathan?,” (Les prophéties merveilleuses, Paris: Antoine du Bruel, 1589, 14.)

on providing their public with answers to these questions, Leaguers focused on the monarch’s request for the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, since it represented the moment in which he would have had to open up his soul.\footnote{143} This sacrament was, to be sure, one of the most important ones in the life of a Christian, since, in order to be forgiven and be deemed worthy of salvation, one needed to clear one’s conscience.\footnote{144} Because forgiveness was predicated on the dying man’s sincerity when disclosing his sins, a true and remorseful confession was necessary for this sacrament to be accomplished. The choice by Leaguers to circulate pamphlets recounting the king’s alleged final words was a logical one: the manner in which the king had confessed before receiving the Sacrament of Extreme Unction and the content of his confession would reveal whether or not he had indeed expressed contrition over his past actions, and whether or not he was worthy of being pardoned and saved.

In one of these pamphlets—\textit{Les propos lamentables de Henry de Valois, tirez de sa confession, par un remords de conscience, qui toujours tourmente les miserable}—a panicked Henri III, aware that death is upon him, launches into a merciless confession:

\begin{quote}
\[
\text{[\ldots] mon sepulchre et tombeau ia prest et appareillé aux tenebres pour me recevoir à cause de mes pechés, et pour le grand nombre d’icieux: car premiérement j’ay transgressé tous les commandements de mon Dieu [\ldots]. J’ay esté adultere, fornicateur, paillard, incestueux, sodomite, plain de faux temoignage: brief j’ay vescu en tout orgueil, pompe, avarice, vaine gloire, luxe, gourmandise, envie, yvrongerie, ire et paresse, pour lesquels je suis ia reprouvé et privé de tous biens.\footnote{145}}
\] 
\end{quote}

\footnote{143} Many of the pamphlets during the period focus on the priest’s hesitation to absolve Henri III during the Sacrament of the Extreme Unction since the pope had in fact excommunicated the king.

\footnote{144} “To participate in a sacrament and to die were the most serious and ‘dangerous’ acts of a Christian. They required sinlessness, guiltlessness, a clear conscience.” (Thomas Tentler, \textit{Sin and confession on the eve of the Reformation}, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 1977, 74.)

This hyperbolically long list of sins—which we are here forced to abridge—is clearly meant to render the king’s guilt irrefutable. Also, the dead is speaking of his own sin, making himself the instrument of his condemnation in a confession that appears as a deserved violence performed against himself—by making use of the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, the text evidently seeks to render the king’s guilt all the more convincing. A legal dimension also guides the writing of this fictional confession. If Henri III had confessed to his deeds, no other evidence, it seems, would be necessary to prove that he was guilty and unworthy of forgiveness: out of the three traditional ways of determining guilt in the Roman canon law of proof—either by a defendant’s confession, the testimony of two eyewitnesses, or other circumstantial evidence (indicia)—the confession of guilt, a form of evidence approved by tribunals, was undoubtedly the most powerful.146

These imagined confessions sought to render the culpability of the king incontestable. However, signs of true remorse during confession could also lead to forgiveness. If the public were convinced that the king had confessed sincerely, it could be believed that his guilt (culpa) had been absolved and his sins atoned for (even if it technically still meant that he would have to perform works of satisfaction in purgatory). The leaguer’s interest was to persuade them that Henri III’s deathbed confession had been insincere and that he would suffer the consequences of his duplicity in the eternity of hell. Depicting this particular truth-revealing moment in pamphlets hence became crucial. In Les propos lamentables de Henry de Valois, tirez de sa confession, par un remords de conscience, qui toujours tourmente les miserables, the writer composed a striking and telling soliloquy, in which Henri III’s debate with his conscience leads him to recognize his

sins, but also his incapacity to experience true, soul-cleansing remorse:

[...] j’ay desobey à mon Dieu pour suyvre le diable, autheur de toute menterie, lequel pour m’attraper m’a presenté les delices, mais non pas l’ordure ny la tristesse cachée soubst telles faulse promisses. Il ne m’a pas invité avec le remors interieur de ma miserable conscience, ou cognoissance de moy-même: mais avec choses vaines exterieures, il a fait tout ainsi que nous appren par tres belles similitude le sermon Evangelique quand il parle des nopces où estoit nostre Seigneur, Omnis homo primum vinum bonum ponit, et cum inebriati fuerint, tunc id quod detersus est. O Satan tu m’as versé au commencement le bon vin, lors que tu me passois d’une vaine esperance, mais apres que la fureur du mauvais desir que tu m’avaoit fiché au cerveau est venue à son effect, alors tu m’as presenté ce qu’est pire et ne vaut rien, en tant que l’espine demeure fichée en ma conscience de remord, qui me pique et me tourmente en l’esprit, de sorte que le vin qui paravant par faulfe delectation me sembloit plaisant, me crucie, tourmente et vexe aigrement: le commencement me sembloit pur vin, mais à la fin j’ay cogneu que ce n’estoit rien que lie: tu me promettois douceur, et je n’ay qu’amertume; tu me promettois pais, je n’ay que discorde, et vois toute la France revoltée contre moy [...]147

Satan didn’t seduce Henri III by offering him the pangs of a remorseful conscience, or introspective self-knowledge (“[le diable] ne m’a pas invité avec le remors interieur de ma miserable conscience, ou cognoissance de moy-même”), but with earthly pleasures, exterior things. Full of the fury of villainous desires, unable to extract himself from the devil’s hold, he now must face the payment for his wickedness: the pure wine has turned into dregs (“le commencement me sembloit pur vin, mais à la fin j’ay cogneu que ce n’estoit rien que lie”). Here lies the skill of the pamphleteer: the complaint of the dying king (or already dead—the text is not clear on this point) cannot count as a redeeming form of remorse, as a contrition capable of opening the gates of heaven. The thorn that remained fixed in the king’s “conscience,” tormenting his spirit, is not true contrition, but the regret of having realized too late that the devil’s promises were false. The king, as the pamphlet elsewhere makes clear, had thought that he could enjoy sinful pleasures and then turn to repentance just in time to be saved:

147 Les propos lamentables de Henry de Valois, tirez de sa confession, par un remords de conscience, qui toujours tourmente les miserables, 7-8 (My emphasis).
[...] finalement mon péché me condamne, et parle à l’encontre de moy. O mes pechez et delices me rendez vous ainsi ce que m’aviez promis ? [...] vous m’avez amadoué et amignotté par vos delices et blandices à descendre en vostre fosse, et me monstriez que de ce lieu pouvois facilement sortir par penitence, mais quand me suis precipité audict lieu, m’avez rompu, brisé et si fort aveuglé, que n’ay vertu ny puissance, si fort suis froissé, et presque tout ver moulu, tellement que je ne puis sortir ny me relever de la fosse où suis tresbusché là me tenez captif, lié, ferré, et emprisonné, gisant couché en oubliance de tous biens, et de mon propre salut sans pouvoir parler ne remuer pied ne jambe d’amendement, en attendant que m’ayez livré aux marchans d’enfer, qui leur marchandise quierent emporter au lac de mort perdurable, car j’ay failli par trop, j’ay desservi et merité, cela ne puis nier.148

[...] O temps de clemence, je t’ay bien perdu! Ô temps de penitence, je t’ay despendu [dépensé]! Faux diable tu m’as bien trahi, tu me meines à ceste heur e à perdition, en enfer est mon eternelle habitation, ayant Lucifer pour mon patron, et diables pour me tourmenter, sans aucun abry de consolation.149

The king realizes that he cannot easily escape the torments of the underworld by falling back on the ritual of penance, as the devil had falsely suggested (“[…] et me monstriez que de ce lieu pouvois facilement sortir par penitence”). It is too late, and his descent into the pit of hell is irreversible. Held “captif, lié, ferré, et emprisonné, gisant couché en oubliance de tous biens,” already in the grip of death, or maybe already buried, he can no longer make amends for his past actions (“[…] ne remuer pied ne jambe d’amendement”). Even his apparent past acts of repentance are revealed as having been, from the start, hypocritical: “[…] je me suis voulu couvrir d’un sac mouillé [de pénitent], qui plus m’a nuit que profité: et par ainsi pensant excuser mon forfait detestable, je suis accusé et mon péché descouvert devant celui qui sçait tout.”150 Worse than the fires of hell is an unhappy conscience that cannot find the true repentance leading to God’s pardon: “[…] qui pis est, le ver de ma conscience malheureuse

148 Ibid., 12 (My emphasis).

149 Ibid., 25.

150 Ibid., 11.
toujours rongeant, mordant et piquant interieurement mon ame, plus de peines et de douleurs m’engendre au cœur que l’aspre feu [...]."

Fallen too far into sin, Henri III must not only submit to the torments of hell, but also be punished by remorse, which could here be understood as an ineffective, powerless, and debased form of repentance, the one the sinner experiences when his pleasures are suddenly taken away from him.

If, in this pamphlet, the king’s confession seems to be both taking place on his deathbed and in hell, other texts and documents by Leaguers, published before and after his death, were less ambiguous in this regard. In Les Articles du Dernier Testament de Henry de Valois, Henri III is depicted as being carried off by a devil towards the fiery pit of hell (see figure 7). Les prophéties merveilleuses advenues à l’endroit de Henry de Valois 3 de ce nom, jadis Roy de France show the king accused of being the older son of Satan (“il a esté le fils ainé du Diable”), and in the engraving of Le Faux Mufle decouvert du grand hypocrite de la France, he is represented as an actual devil (see figure 9): two horns protrude out from his

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151 Ibid., 19.


head and large, pointy ears stick out from his face (this last trait evidently enhancing the demonic aspect of his appearance, as well as suggesting that he was able to hear the dark call of Lucifer, inaudible to the righteous). In this document, Henri III is also portrayed wearing the penitential sackcloth from his Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame—clearly identifiable thanks to the symbol on the shoulder of his religious habit (a circle with a cross of the Societas confalonis)—as if he were a devil hiding behind the cloak of his penitential habit. Another engraving, L’hermitage préparé pour Henry de Valois, plays on this association between hell and penitential orders in an even more explicit way. It shows Henri III being invited by two infernal penitents to descend into the mouth of hell (see figure 10), where he will join them in their new religious order. The fratres or “hermites infernaux,” whose three-pronged talons poke out from beneath their habit, have reserved a place for him in their demonic hermitage:

Laissez Henry laissez les monasteres humains,  
Et cessez de hanter Feuillans et Capuchins ;  
Qui sont les lieux ausquelz avez fait l’hipocrite  
Et venez avec nous porter l’habit d’hermite :  
L’hermitage est tout prest, nous l’avons préparé :  
Et de chesnes et de fers tout a neuf réparé […]  

Isolated from the other regions of the underworld in a “lieu retiré,” Henri III will be placed under the spiritual guidance of a monstrous devil: “le (pater), frere Henry, est un homme incogneu /

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157 Ibid., 125.
Monstrueux, noir, enfumé, fort puissant et cornu / Qui n’a nul blanc en l’œil […]” The other dark Princes of this underworld, aware of the king’s “unjust” execution of the Guises, have lit the furnaces of hell for him especially for this reason: “les Princes infernaux / Ont fait pour ce mal-heur chauffer tous leurs fourneaux.” ¹⁵⁸ The monarch confesses his crimes and accepts the infernal penitents’ invitation:

> Je veux vivre avec vous et mourir désormais […]
> O que je suis heureux de scavoir où loger
> Non comme vagabond en pays estranger
> Mais avec mes amys qui jour et nuict sans cesse
> Pour me desennuyer et me chatouillent et caressent […]
> Pourquoy tout maintenant je veux me despouiller
> Et d’un long manteau gris comme vous m’habiller.”¹⁵⁹

Before his assassination Leaguers had wanted to depose Henri III by tonsuring him and sequestering him in a cloister—now they were imagining him locked away in a hermitage located in hell, a kind of “cloître inversé.” Such a place, previously unknown to Christian topography, appears as a puzzling hybrid of purgatory and hell. Purgatory (purgatorium, purgatorius)—which signifies “purification” and is derived from purgare (“to cleanse, to purge”)—was the place in which repentant souls, in a state of grace, would go to expiate the sins for which they had performed insufficient penance while on earth. Even if guilt (culpa) was remitted, they would have to undergo the temporal punishment (poena) still remaining by purging their penalty (“peine”) in the afterlife or undergoing certain “épreuves.”¹⁶⁰ Repentant sinners, in order to cleanse their souls, would be held in this place that was not hell, but shared

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 125.

with it certain characteristics. The place described in *L'hermitage préparé pour Henry de Valois*, because it is a place of penitence, is thus clearly reminiscent of this definition of purgatory. Yet, because it is not located in an intermediary space between hell and heaven, we understand that no redeeming purgation will take place in it for Henri III: unlike purgatory, which implies a limited duration to punishment, this hellish hermitage offers fruitless repentance *ad infinitum*. Thus, what such a place appears to suggest is that the king’s crimes won’t be redeemed: “*je n’ay point d’esperance que Dieu me pardonne mes forfaits qui luy sont en abomination* […].”¹⁶¹ The king’s punishment, as imagined by this pamphleteer, combines the sufferings of hell with those of purgatory, making the king’s repentance as inefficient in death as it had been—at least according to Leaguers—in life. Searching for a way to represent the restoration of order his party wanted to bring about, the writer of *L’hermitage préparé pour Henry de Valois* imagined the king being plagued by the very concept he had allegedly misused and corrupted during his lifetime. Henri III’s “false” repentance was now being turned against him and became the expression of his punishment. Interestingly, in this satirical representation, as well as others like it, Leaguers seemed to not be able to escape the rhetoric of penance. They continued to represent Henri III repenting, still and forever, in hell, therefore enacting themselves a kind of involuntary and veiled penitential writing. While the mortification of the body politic that Henri III had sought to achieve through his own penitential exemplarity had been reviled by so many, a rupture could only be envisioned through the use of the same penitential imagery and concepts. This text can thus be understood as a kind of negative, critical replaying of the monarch’s own model: it was a rupture without a rupture.

The yet-to-be-converted Protestant, Henri IV, was no doubt also an oblique, if not direct,

target of these representations. Naturally, Leaguers could not use exactly the same imagery or discourses as those used against Henri III, since the “sac du pénitent” could only truly be associated with the last Valois king. But it did not mean that the representations of Henri III’s “doomed” afterlife could not be used to think about the possible death of the next king. If Henri III had ended up in hell, the “heretical” Bourbon, the leader of the Huguenots, would no doubt endure the same fate, since he was the king who refused, at least at first, to convert to Catholicism, and therefore to fully repent.

Conclusion

From the spectacular processions of Henri III to the insurrectional ones involving the people of Paris and the Holy League, penance had become a pervasive concept in the public sphere. The penitential ethos that the last Valois king had attempted to impose on the body politic took on renewed importance. If the king had been criticized repeatedly during his lifetime for the hypocrisy of his penitential devotions, Leaguers incontestably enacted their own appropriation of the concept after the day of Barricades and the assassination of the Guises, and the death of Henri III did not signal the end of their politicization of penance. Incorporated into the topography of hell, repentance now became a divine instrument of punishment. No longer circumscribed to the world, no longer a means for reconciliation or forgiveness, the theological concept of penance had become for the Holy League a political weapon that in turn served to politicize the hereafter. Henri IV’s conversion will constitute, as we will soon see, another turning point in the theological-political transformation of penance.
PART II

PENANCE AT ITS LIMITS
CHAPTER 3

THE CRISIS OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE: HENRI IV’S CONVERSION

One of the most important events to occur in France at the end of the sixteenth century was the conversion of Henri IV to Catholicism.\(^1\) It also happens to be a crucial moment—albeit considerably overlooked—in the history of the theological-political uses of repentance we have so far tried to construct. If historians have long focused on the king’s famous “saut perilleux”\(^2\) and his notorious quip “Paris vaut une messe”\(^3\) (‘Paris is

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\(^3\) As historians like Michael Wolfe and Richard S. Love have noted, it is highly unlikely that the king used this expression. It was no doubt the product of his enemies and most of the texts by Leaguers we will discuss in this chapter used it or a variant on the same idea. In *Les Caquets de l’accouchée*, a text published twelve years after Henri IV’s assassination, the duke of Lesdiguières attributed the expression to Henri IV’s Protestant minister, Maximilien de Béthune (the Duke of Sully), who apparently said “The crown was
surely worth a Mass’), very little scholarship has been dedicated to the central role played by repentance during his abjuration of Protestantism and the ceremony held in great pomp at Saint Denis in 1593. Many questions have been left without a detailed answer: how did Henri IV express his contrition? What kind of ritual of absolution did he observe? What works of satisfaction did he perform? One of the reasons that may explain such omissions in the existing scholarly literature is that those most preoccupied with such questions at the end of the sixteenth century were in fact Ultra-Catholic Leaguers. Forced into exile after 1594 and cast as traitors, or “ligueurs espanolisés,” they have remained, so to speak, on the “wrong side” of history, and their writings and opinions have been subjected to a kind of damnatio memoriae. Those interested in Henri IV, long celebrated as the ruler who “saved” France from the Wars of Religion, have tended to downplay the Leaguers’ political influence on his conversion, as well as the importance of their perspective, expressed in a considerable body of texts, in shaping the public’s perception of the event. Only recently, in the past two decades or so, has the role played by the Sainte Union begun to be reassessed by scholars such as Robert Descimon and José Javier Ruiz Ibañez, who have shown that the writings of Ultra-Catholics cannot be reduced to the isolated ravings of fanatics or of marginaux cut off from the rest of Catholic France, but in fact reflect some of the major concerns of many of their coreligionists.  

To be sure, Leaguers were persuaded of the righteousness of their cause and their interpretation of their loyalty to the Catholic Church, which prohibited them

surely worth a mass” (“La couronne vaut bien une messe”). Pierre de L’Etoile mentions a similar anecdote in his Mémoires Journaux.

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from accepting any form of “liberté de conscience,” often led them to exert violence against Protestants. But ignoring their perspective because of its intolerant and hateful bent, or only considering it in order to denounce their arguments as illegitimate, as many have done, has skewed our perceptions of the political landscape in the crucial last years of the century, particularly, again, when it comes to the Leaguers’ role in shaping Henri IV’s conversion and to the considerable sway they held over public opinion. Leaguers no doubt raised questions that reflected some of the preoccupations and sentiments of many Catholics of a more moderate cast, who would never have engaged in the debates or actions of the League with its militancy, but still espoused a surprising number of their principles.5

Part of the goal of this chapter will be to reassess the Leaguers’ theological-political reading of the king’s conversion by examining the theological debates and arguments about penance that made their way into the writings of some of the most famous members of the party.6 If, with the last Valois, repentance had become, as we have seen in previous chapters, a powerful political tool in shaping religious and political

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5 As we have seen in the years leading up to Henri III’s assassination (see chapters one and two), they often were involved in the activities of the Leagues.

6 There is a rich number of Leaguer pamphlets on Henri IV’s conversion. Many of them will not be discussed in this chapter even if their views often converged with the authors discussed here. See, for instance, *Metamorphose d'Henry de Bourbon jadis roy de Navarre, faussement et iniquement pretendant d'estre Roy de France [...] Ensemble la Bulle de nostre S. Pere le Pape Sixte V*, (Lyon: J. Pillehotte), 1589; *Le remerciment des catholiques unis, faict a la Declaration & Protestation de Henry de Bourbon, dict Roy de Navarre* (Lyon: Jean Pillehotte, prins sur la copie imprimée à Paris), 1589; *Syllogismes en quatrains sur l'election d'un Roy*, (Lyon : Par Jean Pillehotte), 1593; Nicolas Rolland Duplessis, *Censure d'un livret n'aguères imprimé à Paris, en forme de Dialogue, soubs les noms du Manant & du Maheutre entreprenleurs. A tous les bons & francs Catholiques du party de l'Union*, (Paris: M. D.), 1594; Claude de Rubys, *Le Bouclier de la reunion des vrais Catholiques François, contre les artifices du Bearnosm des Heretiques et leurs fauteurs et adherantz*, (Lyon: Jehan Pillehotte libraire & imprimeur de la S. Union), 1589.
identities, it is important to note that the theological underpinnings of the concept, up until the conversion, had not been at the forefront of most people’s preoccupations. The penitential processions that had occurred in the North of France had changed social practices and beliefs about repentance, but they had not been the product of a real debate on the *Sacrament of Penance*. Of course, this is not to say that the rite had not been previously the source of great contention: Protestants had for a long time criticized its theological foundations, and following the publication of Martin Luther’s *Ninety-Five theses*, there had been serious disputes amongst Catholics and Protestants concerning what constituted a proper confession, who held the power of the keys, or what role grace and faith played in the salvation of the sinner. But when Henri IV decided to abjure Protestantism in 1593, an act that gave him access to the throne, the Sacrament of penance came under a different kind of scrutiny. After having started to voice their concerns that Henri IV’s conversion risked being “contaminated” by the theology of Protestantism, Leaguers soon came to see the ritual as the central piece in an act of political legerdemain, denouncing its legitimacy with increasing urgency in a slew of inflammatory writings that have seldom been studied.

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7 Haunting Henri IV’s 1593 conversion is of course his previous one in 1572, which Leaguers evoked to emphasize his alleged fickleness. Introduced to Calvinism from an early age by his mother, Jeanne d’Albret, Henri de Navarre was forced to renounce his faith after the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. When he escaped in 1576, he recanted his conversion to Catholicism and led Huguenots in the subsequent wars. See, for instance, *Copie des lettres du Roy de Navarre, et de monsieur le Prince de Condé*, envoyée à nostre tresseainct Pere le Pape, pour estre reunis à la sancte Eglise Catholique, Romain, (Lyon: Michel Jove, 1572); Janine Garrison, *Henri IV*, (Paris: Ed. Du Seuil, 1984), 61-76. In 1585, the pope, Sixtus V, published a “bulle privatoire” declaring that Henry de Navarre and the Prince of Condé were “déchus comme hérétiques et relaps,” and that the king’s subjects were no longer responsible for maintaining their “serment de fidélité” towards him. See *La Declaratión de nostre Saint Pere le Pape Sextus cinquiesme a l'encontre de Henry de Bourbon, soit disant Roy de Navarre, & Henry semblablement de Bourbon, prétendu Prince de Condé heretiques, contre leurs posteritez & successeur, par laquelle tous leurs subjects sont declarez absous de tous sermêts qu'il leur auroit juré fait ou promis*, (n.p.: n.p., 1585).
The King’s Contrition: Crocodili Lachrymae

The first major criticism that Leaguers directed at Henri IV in the context of his abjuration concerned the time it took for him to change faiths: “[...] il a attendu à faire sa pretendue conversion jusques à l’extremité, et pour sauver son estat qu’il voyoit perdu pour luy [...].” It appeared strange that the king should have waited four years after Henri III’s assassination before converting, a length of time that contrasted glaringly with the speed of the actual process once it had been initiated: “Veu qu’ayant attendu quatre ans, à peine estoit-ce commencé, que l’on a dit que c’estoit faict. Les vrayes conversions, specialement d’heretiques, pour les rendre nettes et pures, n’ont coutume d’aller si viste.” When Henri IV had at last made his “perilous leap,” he devoted little time to the actual conversion. As noted by the theologian Jean Boucher, the king dispensed with the

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8 François Cromé, Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant, (Genève: Droz, 1977), 65-66. “Manant [version ligueur]: [...] il a attendu à faire sa pretendue conversion jusques à l’extremité, et pour sauver son estat qu’il voyoit perdu pour luy, pour deux raisons : La premiere, que sa noblesse catholique le menacoit de le quitter, et avoit senty le vent d’un party en sa maison en faveur du Cardinal de Bourbon et du Conte de Soissons pour le deposeder. Et le second, quant il a veu que les Estats de France ont nommé un autre Roy que luy, et qu’il estoit prest d’estre publie, lors il a esté contraint d’aller à la messe par une vraye, evidente et manifeste force et contrainte, et consequemment telle pretendue conversion [est] très dangereuse et pernicieuse.” (Ibid., 65-66); “Je la tire [la quatrième conjecture contre Henri IV] de l’escrit de monsieur de Bourges qui dit que le Roy de Navarre en sa conversion pretendue s’est laissé flechir aux prières des siens. Car si cela est vray, s’ensuit il pas en bonne Dialectique, qu’il n’y a eu de volonté, ou s’il y a eu volonté, que c’a esté forcee, qui n’oppere rien.” (Louis Dorléans, Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete, 113.)

9 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, prince de Bearn, à S. Denys en France, le dimanche 25 juillet 1593...par Me Jean Boucher, (N.P.: chez G. Chaudière, 1594. Jouxte la copie imprimée à Paris), 115. “Donc ma troisiesme conjecture, dit-il [L’Abbé d’Episteme], est fondée sur ceste conversion si soudaine et si inesperée. Car les spheres du ciel n’ont point un cours si rapide, ny les astre un mouvement si soudain, ny les fleuves des cheutes si precipitees, comme a esté soudaine ceste conversion. [...] Mais je croy que ny le moment et l’instant, ny le clain d’oeil, ny la pensee, ne peuvent agir si soudainement, comme soudainement est apparue ceste conversion. On dit que nul ne se fait meschant tout à coup, mais plus difficilement croyons nous, que d’un mechant homme, il se face un homme de bien tout à coup. [...] au banquet d’une vraye conversion il faut s’y preparer long temps au paravant et faire que rien ne demeure derriere.” (Louis Dorléans, Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete, 95-96)
traditional pace prescribed by the Church for such a transformation, and had the temerity of designating “le jour, qu’il se devoit convertir, comme si c’estoit une action purement humaine, et non une œuvre de Dieu.” He had only remained with his confessor “une petite heure” before presenting himself for absolution:

Et là fut ceste conversion en un instant, pour le conduire à l’Église. Ou quoy que soit, il fut servy comme un lapin, di brocca in bocca, comme on dit, en une mesme heure huguenot, et en la mesme Catholique. Et puis le voila à la Messe, et sonne tabourin, vive le Roy.

In Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete, où il se tracite de la dissimulation du Roy de Navarre, et des mœurs de ses partisans, Louis Dorléans, a renowned Leaguer pamphleteer, expressed the same idea through the voice of one of his characters, L’Abbé d’Episteme:

De sorte que celuy [Henri IV] qui a unze heures estoit encore Huguenot, à unze heures et une minute, estoit devenu Catholique, et si entierement converti, que depuis l’extremité des ungles jusques à la sommité des derniers cheveux c’est n’estoit que Conversion.

For both Jean Boucher and Louis Dorléans, the hastiness and abruptness of the king’s “miraculeuse conversion” did not agree with the traditional patterns of spiritual transformation. A true conversion could only take place in two legitimate ways—either by human or divine intervention. The first “ordinary” manner entailed the aid and intercession of men who transmitted religious knowledge to the individual by “human” methods of persuasion: “Les moyens humains sont la predication, l’instruction, la

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10 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 112.

11 Ibid., 115.

12 Louis Dorléans, Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d'Arete, 96.
lecture, et la dispute, par lesquelles la raison esclarcie peut concevoir le bien de la verité et rejeter l’erreur de l’heresie."  

Henri IV had never, according to his detractors, benefited from such methods: “Mais de tous ces moyens, le Roy de Navarre ne s’est jamais aydé.”

He must have been divinely inspired, quips Dorléans’s character, L’Abbé d’Episteme:

Il faut doncq pour operer ceste conversion extraordinaire, qu’il soit survenu des moyens extraordinaires. Et faut, ou que nostre Seigneur Dieu l’aït touché de sa vive voix, comme il convertit Sainct Mathieu l’Evangeliste tout à l’instant, ou qu’il l’aye trebuché de grande violence, comme il fit Sainct Paul le vaisseau d’election, […] pour le convertir si soudainement.

Leaguers did not deny that God could in fact move the soul of an individual in such a sudden and unforeseeable way (the cases of Saint Paul and Mathew the Apostle are important examples of such divine intervention), but were adamant that this had not been what had happened in Henri IV’s case: “Or nous ne nions pas, que Dieu ne l’aït peu faire, car il n’appartient qu’à luy de frapper de tels coups, et si soudainement, et si puissamment. Mais qu’il l’aït fait en son endroit [l’endroit de Henri IV], nous le nions obsolvement [absolument].” This is because heretics, asserts L’Abbé d’Episteme, rarely undergo such sudden spiritual transformations: “[Dieu] n’a pas accoustumé d’operer ainsi soudain envers les heretiques. Non qu’il n’en ait bien la volonté et la puissance, mais l’aspreté, et la dureté et la qualité et la rebellion du mal et sa justice l’en

13 Ibid., 103.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 103-104.

16 Ibid., 104.
empechent.” If Leaguers like Boucher and Dorléans criticized the speed of Henri IV’s conversion—which (as we will see in the next chapter) was also an important topic for Royalists, albeit in a very different way—it was because they saw it as the first sign of his impenitence, a revealing clue as to the real state of his conscience. Of particular concern to the Leaguers was the way in which he had expressed his remorse during the ceremony. According to Dorléans, the king had in fact failed to shed a single tear:

Mais quand vous verrez le Roy de Navarre, qui se dit si bien converty, monstrez hardiment ses yeux, et dites, Voyla les yeux, voyla la porte par laquelle il n’est jamais sorty une larme pour avoir tant offensé Dieu. Et certainement comme l’alambic quand il degoute, nous monstre par indices certain, qu’il y a de la chaleur aussi quand les yeux degoutent aux poenitens, c’est un argument certain que le brasier du Saint Esprit, est allumé dedans leurs cœurs, et que la froideur de la dissimulation est dehors, et que les charbons ardens de la contrition, en ont tiré les larmes qui en coulent.\(^{18}\)

According to the striking penitential chemistry expounded by l’Abbé d’Episteme (whose name, formed after the Greek ἔπιστήμη, makes clear he is the voice of knowledge, science and understanding), “[…] *les vrais penitents ne sont jamais sans larmes,*”\(^{19}\) for they are the outward marks of a sinner’s remorse, a sign that the Holy Ghost is moving the heart of the penitent towards righteousness. On the contrary, heretics are considered to have scorched hearts of stone: “[ils] n’ont jamais esté nouris que d’aridité et de siccité, ont les cœurs durs, et les yeux secz, et n’y a rien qui les amolisse. Ce sont cœurs de

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 134-135. A similar idea can be seen in the Leaguer version of the famous pamphlet entitled the *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, in which the Manant explains the absence of the king’s tears: “Car quant à la contrition [de Henri de Navarre], il n’en a porté aucunes marques […] et n’a-on veu aucunes larmes de ce nouveau converty, qui est allé à sa conversion le tambour sonnant, et avec toute sumptuosité, pour se faire paroistre à l’exterieur, pour faire croire l’interieur et attraper la simplicité des catholiques à la mode des heretiques, le naturel desquels est de commencer par hypocrisie et finir par tyrannie. (François Cromé, *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, Genève: Droz, 1977, 64)

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 134.
pierre, cœurs de incirconciz, cœurs de roches non attendris. By asserting that Henri IV had failed to expressed any real contrition, Leaguers were attempting to undermine his supporters who claimed that his tears, very much to the contrary, had been entirely sincere. In the Royalist version of the most famous pamphlet on his conversion, the *Dialogue d'entre le maheustre et le manant* (a striking rewriting and reappropriation of the better-known eponymous Leaguer original), the Manant, who represents the Leaguer, affirms that Henri de Navarre not only had ceased all kinds of worldly activities (such as hunting and “exercices d’esbat”) in the time leading to his conversion, but that he had in fact also remained in perpetual devotion for three days, “tousjours habillé de noir,” and “tousjours conferant avec les Prelats, les larmes luy venant aux yeux à la moindre remonstrance qu’on luy faisoit de ses fautes passees.” Dorléans’s Abbé d’Episteme responds to Royalist arguments such as this one with the derision of hyperbole and mocks the “buckets of tears” (“[les] seaux des larmes”) supposedly shed by the king: “[Les compagnons du roi] disoient que le Roy de Navarre estoit beau Prince doux et affable, et si bien converty, qu’on luy voyoit saillir des yeux les larmes grosses comme citrouilles, et du cœur des souspirs, qui eussent faict moudre des moulins à vent.” The tears of heretics such as Henri IV were in fact crocodile tears: “[…] ils plorent pour tromper

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21 François Cromé, *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, 64-65.


autrui, Ce sont larmes de Cocodrilles.” The expression *Crocodili lachrymae*—which is found in Polydore Vergil’s *Proverbiorum Libellus* and was famously taken up and explained in Erasmus’s *Adages* (II iv 60)—refers to the hypocritical tears a crocodile allegedly sheds before proceeding to kill and eat its prey:

Κροκοδείλου δάκρυα, Crocodile tears, is used of those who pretend to be deeply affected by the distress of anyone whose destruction they are themselves responsible or for whom they are planning some great disaster. Some writers tell us that when the crocodile sees a man in the distance, it sheds tears before proceeding to eat him.

Inherently dishonest and perfidious, the reptile also uses trickery to trap its prey. According to Erasmus’s interpretation, it will also, when roused by hunger, fill its mouth with water, spray it over a path “by which it knows that other animals, or men, will come down to drink; the plan being that, when they have fallen on the slippery descent, and cannot make their escape, it will seize and devour them. Then, when it has eaten the rest of the body, it softens the head by shedding tears on it, and eats that too.” Dorléans’s use of the adage is clearly meant to suggest that Henri IV’s tears hide a similarly dark fate for France: as false and foreboding as the crocodile’s, they announce that, once assured of his success, the king will in all probability wage war upon Catholics and,


following the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, force them to embrace Protestantism.  

Louis Dorléans was not the only Leaguer to suggest that France was in danger of being deceived by Henri IV. In his *Cinq sermons*, the Franciscan theologian Jean Porthaise also appeared convinced of the doom looming ahead following Henri de Navarre’s rise to power. In one of his sermons, he narrated the tale of the wicked tyrant, Ahab, from the first book of Kings, who masked his idolatry behind the cloak of penance.  

Covetous of Naboth’s vineyard, Ahab seizes his subject’s land and, following the advice of his wife Jezebel, orders men to calumny his victim by claiming he cursed God and the king. This slander results in Naboth’s lapidation at the hand of the people who have been deceived. In punishment for this murder, God orders the prophet Elijah to sentence Ahab to a similar fate: “In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up yours.”

Although the prophet’s words momentarily instill fear in Ahab—he rips off his clothes, puts on a sackcloth, and fasts in penance—he’s repentance is not long lasting and, as Jean Porthaise points out, eventually leads him back to idolatry:

[Achab] a gemy, cheminé pieds nudz, a jeusné et s’est humilié, et n’a impetré salut, que temporel. Car il a fait cela de craincte, car il n’a point laissé du tout les idoles, car il n’a pas reprins les impieteze de sa femme [Jezabel] et de ses subjects. Car le desir de conserver son estat, luy a extorqué telle penitence selon les Docteurs Hebrieux.”

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27 *Cuius regio, eius religio* (in Latin literally “whose reign, his religion,”) refers to the principle that a ruler has the right to dictate what religion dominates on his land.

28 1 Kings 21

29 1 Kings 21:20

30 Jean Porthaise, “Sermon faict le XXIII d’Octobre, 1593, en l’Eglise de Poitiers, par le Theologal ordinaire : Auquel est traicté de l’absolution Ecclesiastique, qui ne se doit impartir aux descheuz de la Foy : et moins aux recheuz, soit par renegation, par Apostasie, par Heresie, ou par Sorcelerie, sans grande
The parallel Porthaise drew between Ahab and Henri IV was clear: not only had the latter unjustly seized the realm of France, just as Ahab had taken Naboth’s land, but his conversion, a consequence of menacing circumstances and not of genuine repentance, was unlikely to last. Henri de Navarre would most likely “relapse” into Calvinism in the same manner that Ahab returned to serving the prophets of Baal.31

In his *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, prince de Bearn, à S. Denys en France, le dimanche 25 juillet 1593*, Jean Boucher also claimed that Henri de Navarre’s conversion was a subterfuge. Evoking another animal in the decidedly rich political bestiary of his times, he warned his readers of the guileful fox who, according to the ancient *topos* popularized by Machiavelli, used artifice in order to destroy its enemies:

Chacun sçait le traict du regnard, et comme il contrefait le mort, quand il veut attraper les poulles. On sçait le conseil de Lysandre chez des Lacedemontiens, que *Quand la peau du Lyon ne profite, il faut prendre celle du Regnard*. Et comme Machiavel l’atheiste, le grand Docteur des athéistes, leu et practiqués par les seuls atheistes, et aujourd’huy plus que jamais, qui soustient entre autres axiomes (impieté detestable) *qu’il suffit à un Prince de sembler avoir de la religion, encore qu’en effet il n’en ait point*, dit que c’est la ruine d’un Prince d’avoir du lyon sans le regnard, ou du regnard sans le lyon, et qu’il faut s’ayder de tous les deux, c’est à dire, de la perfidie et cruauté ensemble, selon que le cas y eschet.32

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31 See note 7.

32 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 10.
Just as the crocodile hides his intentions behind feigned tears before destroying its prey, the fox plays dead before trapping its hens. “Beware of false prophets,” Boucher also states, quoting from Mathews 7, “they come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

The Machiavellian idea of “appearing to have religion,” while in fact having none, was one of the strategies of war used by Henri IV. It was a “cheval de Troye”: “[…] c’est un trait de guerre, pour mieux tromper son ennemy, de prendre ses armes, sa cazaque, son escharpe, son langage, et sa contenance, à fin de se fourrer peslemesle, sans estre recogneu, et passer comme un faux teston entre plusieurs de bon aloy.”

Boucher even alludes to the cautionary tale of Ishmael and Gendaliah from Jeremiah and the second book of Kings to make his point. Despite having treated Ishmael with humanity, letting him enter the city of Babylon freely, even ordering a banquet to welcome him in accordance with the laws of hospitality, the governor Gendaliah is perfidiously murdered by his guest. Two days later, a large group of penitent mourners with sheared beards, ripped clothing, and cuts covering their bodies enter the city from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria to bring offerings and incense to God’s temple. Ishmael approaches them weeping and beckons them to follow him to greet Gendaliah. Unaware of the murder, they fall into the trap and are soon ruthlessly massacred by him after entering the city. Boucher warns his readers against such pretense of repentance:

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33 The epigraph of his first sermon is taken from Mathews 7, which he gives in the Latin: “Attendite a falsis prophetis, qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium. Intus autem sunt lupi rapaces.”

34 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 10-11.

35 See II Kings 25 and Jeremiah 41.
because he feared that these men, upon learning of Gendaliah’s death, would arm the country against him, Ishmael cast himself in the role of a penitent in order to deceive and destroy them: “[...] de crainte qu’il ait qu’ils ne revelassent le meurtre, qu’il ait commis en la personne dudit Godolias, et ne feissent armer le pays contre luy, alla au devant d’eux, contre-faisant le penitent, et pleurant avec eux, puis les ayant attirez en la ville, les massacra comme les autres.”36 This biblical exemplum was meant to call attention to Henri IV’s deceptions. A soldier like Ishmael, he seemed to repent, but wasn’t he in truth merely preparing the massacre of Catholics and the usurpation of the crown of France? And just as the governor of Babylon, Gendaliah, had acted in a politically imprudent way, ignoring the warnings he had received of Ishmael’s nefarious intentions, simply because the latter put up a good appearance,37 weren’t the people of Paris also acting foolishly in turning a blind eye to the Bourbon king’s false penance? This lack of political acumen would be France’s downfall, according to Boucher, if, replicating Gendaliah’s tragic mistake, Parisians placed their credence in Henri IV and let him enter their city.

A Proper Confession for a “Heretical” King

Along with such attacks calling attention to the ways in which Henri IV’s contrition—the first essential component to the Sacrament—deviated from what should have been a proper expression of penitential remorse, others targeted the ritual of

36 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 11.

37 “[...] quoy que ledit Godolias en eust esté adverty, ne l’ayant voulu croire pour la bonne mine dudit Ismaël [...]” (Ibid., 11.)
confession, claiming he had also fallen short of meeting the necessary conditions set by the Catholic church for this crucial part of the ceremony of his conversion:

Car pour la confession, on sçait entre autre qualitez, que l’on nombre jusques à seize, qu’il y en a cinq essentielles, sçavoir est, qu’elle soit accusante, nuë, entiere, fidele, et preste à obéir. Accusante, pour ne s’excuser : nuë, pour ne rien deguiser : entiere, pour ne rien obmettre ny celer : fidele, pour dire verité : et preste à obeîr, pour faire ce qui sera ordonné.\(^{38}\)

Boucher is alluding here to the sixteen conditions that typically characterized a good confession, as they were understood in the Middle Ages. As Thomas Tentler has explained, they could be summed up in mnemonic formulas like this one ascribed to St. Thomas, in his commentary of Book IV of the *Sentences* by St. Antoninus of Florence, Angelus de Clavasio, Sylvester Prierias, and Godescalc Rosemondt:

\[
\textit{Sit simplex, humilis, confession, pura, fidelis,} \\
\textit{Atque frequens, nuda, discreta, libens, verecunda,} \\
\textit{Integra, secreta, lachrimabiliis, accelerata,} \\
\textit{Fortis, et accusans, et sit parere parata.}
\]

Let the confession be simple, humble, pure, faithful, And frequent, unadorned, discreet, willing, ashamed, Whole, secret, tearful, prompt, Strong, and reproachful, and showing readiness to obey.\(^{39}\)

Boucher stressed five of these conditions—\textit{accusans} (“\textit{accusante}”), \textit{nuda} (“\textit{nuë}”), \textit{integra} (“\textit{entière}”), \textit{fidelis} (“\textit{fidèle}”), and \textit{parere parata} (“\textit{preste à obeîr}”). The sinner must first have an attitude of self-reproach (\textit{accusans}) before confessing his sins in a clear and “unadorned” fashion, without deceit or obscurity (\textit{nuda}). He must not withhold or omit any information (\textit{integra}), which means faithfully disclosing the entire truth.


(fidelis). Lastly, he must be ready to obey by accepting the judgment of the priest (parere parata). Although all of these qualities were considered equally crucial for a good confession, Boucher focused on the length of Henri IV’s confession in order to prove the falseness of his conversion: “le point le plus important, savoir si elle est entière ou non, voyons le temps qu’elle a duré. Car l’argument est peremptoire. Comment ? de la trousser si court ? que ce soit fait en demy heure ?”

His confession was, according to him, cut so short, “si court,” (it was barely “une demy heure”) that it could hardly have been considered truthful since the king’s “longue liste de péchés” could have filled a large book (“gros livre”). Denouncing in such a way this confession’s lack of completeness (integra), Boucher called his readers’ attention to one of the most universal assumptions held about confession during the Middle Ages—namely that those who submitted to it must reveal all of their sins in a detailed, methodical, and comprehensive way. As Thomas Tentler further explains, completeness “is the first, necessary condition, and it is a truly ubiquitous criterion by which the work of the penitent is judged. […] To exaggerate the importance of completeness seems hardly possible. It was and has remained indispensable to forgiveness in the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Penance; and it constitutes an essential difference between Catholic and Protestant forgiveness of

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40 Ibid., 108.

41 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 215.

42 Ibid., 215. Jean Porthaise also criticizes the shortness of his confession: “Puis de là jusques devant le grand autel, derriere lequel il se confessa à l’Archevesque de Bourges, tant suscinctement que l’on ne veid onc confession plus courte.” (24)
Boucher’s criticism here is hence also one that targets Henri IV’s Protestant past since he is implicitly suggesting that his confession resembles that of a Protestant rather than a Catholic’s, since the latter would have undertaken a much more systematic and extensive examination of the self, one that the king could never have achieved in such a short amount of time. After more than thirty years of “sinning,” he could not have “syndiquer tant de choses en si peu d’heure[s].”

It was also important for some Leaguers to point out that—rather than having had, as its sole recipient, the priest standing behind the great altar—the king’s confession should have been spoken publically (“une pénitence publique”) in front of the Church and the people (a form of penance that Henri IV would in truth avoid, as we will see in chapter four), in accordance with the stricter and more austere form of repentance recommended by Early Christian writers such as Tertullian or the bishop of Carthage, Saint Cyprian. Boucher contended that, although this form of auricular confession had in fact been banned by pope S. Leo I “pour la honte grande, qui empeschoit l’effet de la confession et penitence […],” traces of it still persisted in Church doctrine and practice, and for good reason. Against the objection made by many of Henri IV’s supporters that such a custom did not apply to princes, Boucher argued that there had in fact been examples of public confessions made by those who had notoriously erred: “[…] si n’ont pourtant laissé d’en demeurer quelques vestiges [de cette pénitence publique] en l’Eglise,


44 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 215.

pour le general, et mesmo la pratique, pour les fautes publiques et patentes. Comme il s’est veu és princes, dont les fautes sont notoires […] The publicity of the crimes and of the person entailed the publicity of the confession: despite such a seductively simple logic, grounded in a tradition that was being opportunistically reactivated, it was obvious that Boucher’s insistence on the fact that the king should perform this kind of penance was part of a concerted effort to emphasize his faults and fragilize his authority.

Error in the Form of the Professio Fidei

Henri IV’s “incomplete” confession and refusal to perform a pénitence publique reminiscent of those held in Early Christianity were not the only aspects of his conduct that contributed, according to Leaguers, to the corruption and debasement of the Sacrament of penance and of the ritual of his conversion: his profession of faith (professio fidei), a key part of a heretic’s penance, had also been fraught with errors and unfortunate departures from tradition. The canonical form of an abjuration prescribed for a heretic was that, in recognition of his faults, he should present himself kneeling before the priest, ask for absolution, perform penance, promise to obey the saint canons, and amend himself. Along with these steps, he should also be properly questioned on “tous les articles de la Foy, à quoy il respond tout haut, et notamment sur les articles, où

46 Ibid., 320. “Mais principalement pour l’heresie, laquelle estant soustenuë des grands comme elle leur fait encourir le crime d’heresiarches, et ne peut estre ceste faute en eux que publique, quand ils en fond profession […]” (Ibid., 320)

47 A convert could be admitted back into the Church by the imposition of hands, by an anointment with chrism, or after having given a profession of faith.

48 For the proper observance of an abjuration and conversion, see also Jean Porthaise’s Cinq Sermons, who describes it in almost exactly the same terms (Cinq Sermons, 22-23).
il auroit erré.” 49 Composed in the form of a libellus or a “formulaire,” a proper professio fidei would have contained nine articles, as advocated in the De justa hereticorum punitione (book III) written by the Franciscan theologian and jurist Alphonse de Castro (1495-1558). 50 According to Boucher, Henri IV’s professio fidei had been defective on seven of these articles: he had not genuinely acknowledged his errors, admitted to the crimes he had committed, renounced his personal form of heresy, confessed his sins without fear of losing his titles (“non de crainte de perdre ses pretentions”), asked for forgiveness from the pope, nor had he performed a righteous penance. 51 Moreover, he had continued to favor the company of heretics (amongst whom his own sister) and had failed to exact punishments upon them. 52 The formulaire to which he had consented and which he had signed (although, as we will see shortly, some were even doubtful that he

49 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 316-317.

50 Alphonse de Castro’s nine articles, as they were explained by Boucher, state that the penitent had to: 1) confess his heresy in its entirety and recognize his errors; 2) ask for absolution and penance with a humble and contrite heart; 3) abjure and anathematize his own particular form of heresy (and the sect to which he belonged) along with all other, general forms of it; 4) promise to remain in allegiance with the faith of the Church; 5) exact justice upon all heretics and their “fauteurs, receleurs et bienfaicteurs”; 6) bring heretics and their consorts before the Church in good faith without complaint and without delay; 7) perform all of the penance required for the faults committed; 8) be anathema, perjurer, and a manifest heretic, without “autre figure de procez, ny condemnation” and suffer the sentences made upon heretics, if he relapses into his previous heresy and fails to perform the proper penance; 9) swear and declare in conscientia to tell the entire truth (if it is found that he has falsified his confession, either by omission or the exclusion of information, the penance and absolution imposed upon him will no longer be valid nor be possible to obtain). (Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 317.)

51 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 333. “De sorte que des neuf parties, de la susdice forme de confession [de foi], pour les simples heretiques, et qui toutes sont essentielles, les sept icy manquent du tout, et où il est question d’un relaps. Et ne s’y en reconnoissent que les deux, et encore rongnées et restreintes, comme il a esté dit.” (Ibid., 333)

52 Ibid.
had done so) acted as the proof of these transgressions because of the “*deffectuosité qui y sont, et manquements des parties necessaires* [...]”\(^{53}\) Being that of a “*converting heretique,*” such a *professio fidei* should have included a particularly convincing demonstration of devotion and penitence, a heartfelt oath of self-transformation, and absolute commitment to the Church—that, according to Boucher, had not been the case at all.\(^ {54}\)

If Boucher went into great detail about Henri IV’s moral and formal infractions to the requisites of a proper *professio fidei*, other Leaguers chose to follow a different approach. In Louis Dorléans’s *Le Banquet et aprèsdînée du conte d'Arete*, l’Abbé d’Episteme—who, as we have already seen, represents a Leaguer—claims that the king actually never signed a profession of faith (“*il n’en a fait jamais*”), despite the fact that, had there ever been someone who should have done so, “*c’estoit luy, qui publiquement et apertement trente six ans et plus, avoit fait aperte et publique profession de l’heresie* […].”\(^ {55}\) Those who insisted that he had professed one were mistaken, he claimed. In fact, only the king’s officers had taken the oath and moreover in a perfidious way: “*De sorte que ce n’estoit luy qui faisoit ceste profession, si tant est que ce fut une profession, mais c’estoit ses officiers, qui comme esclaves, et valets de robe longue, aidoyent a tromper les Catholiques, et qui faisoient pour luy profession d’une creance pretendue* […].”\(^ {56}\)


\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*, 332.


\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*, 129.
Although this claim is historically inaccurate (Henri IV did give a confession of faith, which was later published by Royalists), taking into consideration the actual circumstances in which the pope pardoned the king allows us to better understand the basis on which it could indeed have been made. On September 17, 1595 (the official date of the pope’s absolution), Henri IV’s ambassadors, Jacques Davy Du Perron and Arnaud D’Ossat, were technically the ones to abjure his heresy in Rome. With the king still in France, they stood alone before the pontiff, “s’humiliant et baissans la teste,” and accepted the Holy See’s conditions of punishment and penance. What the Leaguers failed to mention was the fact that this was not an uncommon practice: higher officials were often pardoned in absentia because they could not easily leave their offices or political obligations. Canon law even explicitly allowed for it, stating that it was not absolutely necessary for the person being absolved to be present, since, just as a person could be put under papal censure while being absent, he could also be released from it while being absent.  

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57 See Coppie des lettres du Roy envoyées à Monseigneur de Lavardin, mareschal de France, gouverneur & lieutenant pour Sa Majesté en ce pais du Maine, touchant l’absolution & bénéédiction dont il a pleu à nostre sainct Père le Pape honorer sadicte Majesté, (Mans: Mathurin Le Roux, imprimeur & libraire demeurant en la grand ruë, 1595).


59 “It is not absolutely necessary that the person to be absolved shall be present; for as a person who is absent can be put under censure, by letter, so can he be released from it in like manner. Nay, a person can be absolved by proxy.” (Samuel Bach Smith, Elements of Ecclesiastical Law, New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago: Benziger Brothers printers to the Holy See, 1887-9, vol. 3, 267.)
How could we even be sure there had ever been a profession of faith? Louis Dorléans cleverly pointed out in his long pamphlet that the *formulaire* the king had given to the archbishop of Bourges during the ceremony had never been disclosed, making it impossible for others to verify that the proper steps for the abjuration had indeed been followed by the king and by those who had been in charge of overseeing it and of communicating its outcome to the public:

[II] s’est contenté de la bailler par escrit a Monsieur de Bourges, sans qu’elle ait esté ouie du peuple assistant, et sans que l’on ait sceu, en quels termes elle estoit conceuë. Encore ne scait-on si c’estoit une profession de foy, n’y qu’elle chose c’estoit, et si elle estoit signée ou non. Car son historiographe n’en dit aucune chose, et M. de Bourges le dissimule.60

According to this view, because the king’s *professio fidei* had never been pronounced publically, “de vive voix,”61 it could not be considered valid proof of his spiritual conversion and repentance.

*Error in the Form of the Absolution*

Leaguers also faulted Henri IV on his absolution, which, after the confession, was the second part of the Sacrament of penance. Before the pope rendered the king’s reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church official in 1595, Ultra-Catholics focused on three of its main aspects to prove its invalidity. The first one concerned, in the words of Boucher, “l’indisposition du sujet,”62 which referred to the king’s inflexible character.

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61 *Ibid.*, 128. “[…] ce n’a jamais esté luy, qui l’a prononcée de sa bouche en publique assemblée, et devant que d’entrer en l’Eglise […].” (*Ibid.*)

62 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 308.
The four years he had waited before converting, as well as his earlier years as a Protestant, suggested that he had been resistant to Catholicism. Introduced to Calvinism from an early age by his mother, Jeanne d’Albret, Henri de Navarre had already recanted Catholicism once in 1576. What was to stop him from doing it again with this conversion. Because of his past, they believed he was guilty of manifest contumacy (contumacia manifesta). Not only was it normally forbidden to absolve him because he was considered an obstinate, relapsed heretic, that is to say, a contumax, but it was also believed that he had converted because of the obvious political benefit to be gained by doing so—to succeed to the throne. Many in fact argued that he had been driven by the fear that the Sainte Union would elect another king at the États généraux of 1593, and that rather than truly wanting to become a Catholic, he had abjured out of political opportunism. Converting before Leaguers could elect a new king in his place had made it difficult for his enemies to argue that he was unfit to rule: as a Catholic, he could no longer be accused of heresy. But for Leaguers, staking their faith on Henri IV’s alleged spiritual transformation had dangerous implications for the monarchy.

The second argument used to discredit the validity of the absolution concerned the form taken of the ecclesiastical ceremony. Boucher’s eighth sermon on the conversion—De la nullité d’absolution, pour le vice et defectuosité de la forme—is a particularly representative illustration of a strategy aimed at proving that there had been a patent defect of form. The “nullité d’absolution” refers to a specific concept in ecclesiastical

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63 In order to protect his life, Henri de Navarre was forced to convert to Catholicism in 1572 after the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, but when he escaped the Court in 1576, he recanted this position. For Leaguers, this was the proof that his religious convictions were on the side of Huguenots.
According to Canon law, to claim that an absolution was *null* meant that it was *entirely invalid* since it was missing *essential* prescribed formalities and conditions necessary for a proper absolution. This was different from saying, as some did, that the absolution had been *unjust*, by which it was meant that, although the ecclesiastical censure might have been deemed unfair or faulty because certain conditions had been omitted, the ceremony should *not* be considered invalid and void, since these conditions were not in fact “considered by the law as essentially necessary.” When Boucher declared Henri IV’s absolution null according to the Canon law understanding of the term, asserting that the pontifical censure could not be thought of in terms of a mere injustice, he was in fact following a hard line, with the goal of discrediting the entire ceremony held at Saint Denis. Along with other Leaguers, he saw it as a farce staged by Royalists and devoid of any true ecclesiastical clout.

Among the reasons why Leaguers considered Henri IV’s absolution null was the type of absolution Royalists had administered during the ceremony—an *absolutio ad cautelam*. Executed when it is doubtful whether a papal censure is invalid or not, an absolution *ad cautelam* is a provisional measure granted to an appellant sentenced to excommunication by the Judge before whom an appeal is brought. This measure, which temporarily releases—that is, absolves—the appellant from the censure, must take place *before* the appellant is able to stand trial and make an appeal in an ecclesiastical court, since an anathematized person, technically separated from the Church and possessing no

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64 The details of this theological debate are more complex than what I show here, but for the sake of avoiding prolixity, I have summed up what I believe to be the most important aspect of this dispute.

rights, can make no such appeal. When the investigation or trial is over and the final decision has been made, the Judge—in this case the pope—either releases the appellant from the censure and punishment, declaring it invalid and permanently absolving him, or he establishes the validity of it and annuls the absolution, bounding the appellant to the initial censure and ecclesiastical procedure for punishment.

The Royalists’ decision to use this form of absolution at St. Denis scandalized Leaguers for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they believed that Henri IV and his supporters had quite simply no right to use it. For them, there was absolutely no cause for doubt about the validity of the pope’s censure. The king was an obstinate, relapsed heretic. His crimes against the Church were manifest (offensa manifesta). Resorting to an absolution ad cautelam was a scandalous abuse of Canon law. This “vice de la forme,” as Boucher called it, was a ruse employed to evade the legal constraints of Henri IV’s

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66 Ibid., 231. “Where, however, it is doubtful whether the censure is invalid or not—v.g. where the person who has been censured claims that the censure has been inflicted upon him after he had made an appeal, or that the offence was not fully proved juxta allegata, or that, if proved, it was insufficient—the Metropolitan or judge ad quem when appealed to, should before all else, that is, before he enters upon the hearing of the merits of the case—antequam audire causam incipiat—give the absolution ad cautelam, though only (a) by way of a provisional measure, (b) and citata parte,—i.e., the appellee or judge a quo, and visis actis. Then he should proceed to hear the appeal, and at the end of the trial or investigation he should pronounce final sentence, declaring the censure either valid or invalid. If he declares the censure valid, the absolution “ad cautelam” given in the beginning of the hearing lapses, and the censure revives. But if he declares it null, it ceases absolutely, and the provisional absolution “ad cautelam” passes into an absolute and permanent release from the punishment.” (Ibid.)

67 Ibid., 237.

68 Jean Boucher, Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 304, 308.
excommunication which made it impossible for him to be absolved, since he had no rights as a heretic and was, officially speaking, separated from the Church.69

The Procès-Verbal de la cérémonie de l’abjuration d’Henri IV—a text which, according to the Royalist Claude Gouyne who undersigned it, had been ordered by the prelates who presided over the ceremony—explained the reasons why the king had not been able to go to Rome to ask for forgiveness: “[…] enfin pour plusieurs grandes considérations, mesmement pour la nécessité du temps, le péril ordinaire de mort, ausquelles, et que Sa Majesté, à cause de la guerre, ne peut aller ny envoyer commondément à Rome […].”70 Leaguers told a very different story: the Royalist party had cleverly avoided the pitfalls that could have potentially arisen from an audience by informing the pope that the king would be unavailable to make the voyage to Rome.71 By using this “excuse,” as Leaguers described it, Royalists had sought to evade the charges made by Sixtus V against the king in his bull of excommunication ab immensa aeterni

69 Jean Porthaise makes a similar remark about the improper use of the term cautela: “Le mot cautela est une diction d’esprit et d’avis en nos droits Canon et Civil, et non un mot de ruse et de tromperie […] Que ce mot cautela, signifie prevoyante et remede aux choses douteuses, et difficiles, nostre droit Civil y est conforme, parlant de abundanti cautela. C. de Testamentenis. L. Testamentum. Et la glose en la loy. Illud eleganter in vocabulo exceptit. Et ff. de receptis in arbitrium. L. Quid tamen S. Plenum compromissum in dictione Expressi. Tellement que ce mot cautela, est une raisonable precaution, peur d’être tromper en nos contrats, promesses et actions, parquoy estre absoubs ad cautelam, emporte une prevoyance en un visage legitime, et requis en ce que nous prouverons.” (Cinq Sermons, sermon I, 27-28.)

70 Louis Lafaist et Félix Danjou, Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France, depuis Louis XI jusqu’à Louis XVIII, ou Collection de pièces rares et intéressantes, telles que chroniques, mémoires, pamphlets, lettres, vies, procès…: ouvrage destiné à servir de complément aux collections Guizot, Buchon, Petitot et Leber / par L. Cimber et F. Danjou…., (Paris: Beauvais, 1834-1837), série 1, tome XIII, 347.

71 Another claim Royalists made to explain the length of time it took Henri IV to convert to Catholicism was that he wanted to be properly instructed before making such an important decision: “[…] et qu’on ne devoir trouver estrange si jusques icy il en avoir fait difficulté, ayant pris nourriture et instruction au contraire de laquelle il ne s’estoit voulu légerement desparrir, le salut de son ame lui estant plus cher que toute autre chose […].” (Louis Lafaist et Félix Danjou, Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France, série 1, tome XIII, 348)
Royalists had cunningly invoked one of the exceptions to the law allowed in the Glossa, which, as Samuel Smith explains it, stated that an appellant was permitted to withhold from appearing in court if “the place to which he was cited was not safe, or because he was detained by a lawful impediment, v.g., by sickness.” Making use of the latter part of this exception, they claimed that he had in fact been detained and hindered from safely traveling to Rome and appearing before the pope because of war, assassination plots, and other similar threats to his life. These obstacles, for Royalists, constituted a lawful ground for justifying an absolution ad cautelam, since the king, they claimed, had otherwise always desired to be instructed in the Catholic faith and to convert but had been unable to carry out his spiritual instruction and transformation due to these complicated circumstances.

72 Sixte V, Bulle... contre Henry de Bourbon, (Paris: R. Thierry, 1590); Sixtus V, Sanctiss. D.N. Sixti Papæ V. declatatio contra Henricum Borbonium assertum Regem Navarre et Henricum item Borbonium, praetensum Principem Condensem Haereticos, eorumque posteros et successores: ac liberatio subditorum, ab omni fidelitatis et obsequij debito, (n.p.: n.p., 1585). Sixtus V excommunicated Henri IV and Henri de Condé in the bull Brutum Fulmen in September 1585 (after the death of the Duke d’Anjou, the last living brother of Henri III and heir to the throne). Henri III denounced the pope’s meddling and forbade the publication of the bull, but its contents were soon known all over France. In 1591, the pope Gregory XIV renewed Sixtus V’s bull, but in June 6, 1591, the Châlons Parlement condemned it, sentencing it to be burned. The Parliament of Paris relocated to Chartres and Assembly of Clergy also later burned it. See the “Déclaration des cardinaux, etc. contre les bulles du pape Grégoire XIV” in Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises: depuis l’an 420 jusqu’à la Révolution de 1789: contenant la notice des principaux monumens des Mérovingiens, des Carlovingiens et des Capétiens, et le texte des ordonnances, édits, déclarations, lettres patentes, règlesens,... de la troisième race, qui ne sont pas abrogés, ou qui peuvent servir, soit à l'interprétation, soit à l'histoire du droit public et privé... / par MM. Jourdan,... Decrusy,... Isambert,..., (Leiden: IDC, 19..), vol. 29.

73 See Samuel Bach Smith, Elements of Ecclesiastical Law, 236.

74 In the Royalist version of the Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant, a similar argument is made: “Or le Roy est tous les jours en peril de mort, estant parmy les harquebusades aux sieges et batailles. Joint que vous sçavez que ceux de la Sorbonne, tant ils sont meschants et remplis d’impiété, suscitent tous les jours gens pour l’assassiner.” (François Cromé, Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant, 68)
The third argument that Leaguers used in their quest to invalidate the absolution was to put into question the power of the priest and prelates presiding over the ceremony. Leaguers claimed that the only person who had the authority to pardon the king was the judge _ad quem_ (the judge to whom an appeal may be taken, the superior judge). In this case, that was to say, the pope.\(^75\) The priest who absolved him at Saint Denis—Renaud de Beaune, the archbishop of Bourges—had hence for them no jurisdiction to perform this act. Only the Holy See, who held the power of the keys (the power to bind or loose sins), could pardon him:

> [Sa conversion] n’est assistee d’absolution vallable, n’ayant peu l’Archevesque de Bourges l’absoudre, parce qu’il a esté excommunié nommément par le S. Siege, dont il faut qu’il ait son absolution, et n’en peut avoir d’un autre. Et tout ainsi qu’un remissionnaire d’une condamnation de Cour souveraine, mesmement les nobles, sont tenuz presenter leurs lettres de remission à la Cour, et non à un juge subalterne; ainsi en matiere de jurisdiction ecclesiastique, ce que le souveraine Pontife a faict et ordonné ne peut estre effacé ny osté sans sa licence et permission et de son authorité, tellement que sa conversion pretendue est du tout hypocrite à l’ouvert et sans difficulté, et sa pretendue absolution nulle et sans effect […] \(^76\)

If Leaguers were convinced that the Archbishop of Bourges had no right to forgive the king’s sins, Royalists held, to be sure, the opposite view: “Quant à son absolution” states the Maheustre in _Dialogue d’entre le manant et le maheustre_ (the Royalist version), “il y a assez de prelats en la France sans en aller chercher à Rome.”\(^77\) As we see, this dispute

\(^75\) “Et par consequent luy est de besoing avant que regner estre absoult par le mesme sucesseur de S. Pere autrement son absolution irreguleremt pretendue ad cautelam, ne lui servirait de rien.” (Jean Porthaise, _Cinq sermons_, 30.); “[…] on ne peut ignorer, que par la Bulle du Pape il s’estoit à luy seul reservé cest absolution.” (Louis Dorléans, _Le banquet et aprèsdissnée du conte d’Arete_, 151. See also pages 144-154.)

\(^76\) François Cromé, _Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant_, 66. See also Jean Boucher’s seventh sermon entitled “Du quatriesme moyen d’impuissance, pour l’entreprise faicte par l’archevesque de Bourges, par dessus l’ordinaire.” (Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la pretendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, 273.)

\(^77\) “Maheustre [de l’édition royaliste]: J’ay ouy disputer cecy entre grands personnages sans passion, et la resolution fut que le Pape avoit seulement declaré le Roy estre heretique, et par consequent excommunié. Si bien que cecy estoit une pure declaration de la part du Saint Siege, non pas excommunication fulminee à
between Henri IV’s supporters and Leaguers was also one between Gallicanists and Ultramontanists. Many Royalists upheld the Gallican idea according to which French prelates could autonomously and *de jure* make decisions about the Church in France and perform important rituals such as administering the Sacrament of penance (i.e. absolving the king by means of the authority of the Archbishop in France and not, for instance, the pope). Although they often took counsel on specific cases from the pontiff, his legate, and other higher-ranking prelates, they were not obliged to follow their orders in situations when the monarchy’s authority took precedence or came into conflict with them. The Leaguers who upheld ultramontane views, on the contrary, emphasized the “*impuissance des ministres*” and considered the bishops and prelates who assented to and presided over the ceremony at Saint Denis to be complicit of abetting a heretic. They focused on the canon law of the Fourth Council of Lateran of 1215, which stated that anyone who did so was also anathematized. Pope Sixtus V reaffirmed this canon law in his bull excommunicating Henri IV and Henri de Condé.  

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78 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 308. The Archbishop of Bourges and his adherents were, according to Boucher, guilty of several crimes. The king’s supporters, he stated, fabricated erroneous conjectures to defend Henri IV’s cause, even though he had been excommunicated: they usurped “*la jurisdiction ordinaire*” of the pope, violated “*le droit humain*,” despised papal censures, created a schism, and so on. (287-288)  

79 *Brutum fulmen papae Sixti V adversus Henricum Regem Navarro et Henricum Borbonium principem Condaeum*, (n.p.: n.p.), [1585].
archbishop of Bourges who absolved the king, was hence, for them, no better than a heretic: “[...] on ne peut douter, que ce ne fust chose ridicule, qu’un excommunié donnast absolution a un excommunié, et que celuy qui a les mains, le chef, et les pieds liez, desliat un autre [...] Voyons celle [la bulle] du Pape Sixte dernier, et nous apprendrons comme le Roy de Navarre, et ses fauteurs sont excommuniez.”

Leaguers were, to be sure, attempting to criminalize the actions of the prelates who participated in the ceremony. From the perspective of Canon law, their mere association with the Bourbon king condemned them and excluded them from the Church. Leaguers sought to make it absolutely impossible, from a legal standpoint, for Royalists to defend the interests of the king, and if they insisted considerably on Canon law, it was also and for the most part in order to further their own political agenda and to justify the election of a new—Catholic—king at the États généraux of 1593. Interestingly, pope Clement VIII, who had endorsed the bull of his predecessors, also concurred with many of the Leaguers’ arguments: he considered the ceremony at Saint Denis to be null and was persuaded that Royalists should not have administered an absolution ad cautelam nor allowed the Archbishop of Bourges to absolve the king since this act stood outside of his

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80 Louis Dorléans, *Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d'Arete*, 154-155. “[...] on ne peut douter, que ce ne fust chose ridicule, qu’un excommunié donnast absolution a un excommunié, et que celuy qui a les mains, et le chef, les pieds liez, desliat un autre [...] Voyons celle du Pape Sixte dernier, et nous apprendrons comme le Roy de Navarre, et ses fauteurs sont excommuniez. Voyons la disposition du droit commun, et nous verrons, que tous ils ont encouru la censure, selon le Concile general de Latran, tenus soubs innocent 3 et approuvé par tous les Princes de la Chrestienté, Que si Monsieur de Bourges est de ceux-la, et s’il a favorizé les heretiques estants encore heretiques, et qu’il les favorise encore a present contre le Saint Siege: dirons nous que luy, qui est excommunié, puisse absoudre un excommunié?” (*Ibid.*, 154-155)

jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{82} In 1595, however, he decided to officially issue his pardon because, agreeing with Henri IV’s ambassadors, he recognized the king’s actions as religious despite the “nullité de la cérémonie.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textit{The Satisfaction of Henri IV: Sufficient Poena?}

In order for the Sacrament of Penance and Henri IV’s conversion to be considered entirely complete, it was also essential that he perform mandatory works of satisfaction in order to clear his conscience of his past sins. In theological terms, this meant that, even though the priest had absolved him of his guilt (\textit{culpa}) during his confession (which, as we have already seen, was a point of contention for Leaguers and even for the pope until 1595), the king still had to receive punishment (\textit{poena}) and perform good works to finish his repentance. If his enemies were convinced that all of the other components of his penance should be either invalidated because of faulty form or because the king had been disingenuous in performing them, they were likewise persuaded that he had not fulfilled the demands of the works of satisfaction:

Quant à la satisfaction, il n’a encore ordonné aucune reparation d’Eglises qu’il a ruinees, ny commencé à rendre quelque partie de ce qu’il a ravy, ny fait justice ou chassé d’auprès de luy ses ministres heretiques, qu’il entretient et preschent en sa presence comme de coustume.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} See also Henri IV’s letter to pope Clement VIII, written on August 9, 1593 in Henri IV: Lettres d’amour et écrits politiques, avec quelques lettres reçues par le Roi.

\textsuperscript{83} Benoît Schmitz, \textit{Le pouvoir des clefs au XVIe siècle. La suprématie pontificale et son exercice face aux contestations religieuses et politiques.} Dissertation dir. by Alain Tallon, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2013, vol. II. 1247-1253.

\textsuperscript{84} François Cromé, \textit{Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant}, 64-65.
For many Leaguers, the proper penitential conduct that they believed Henri IV should follow could best be summed up in the lives of exemplary rulers like Theodosius the Great or King David.\(^{85}\) Both of these sovereigns had showed their repentance by performing rigorous acts of satisfaction before they were absolved. For Boucher, Theodosius I was commendable because of the way in which he had received the charge of excommunication made against him by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, that is “non avec furie, mespris, et indignation, mais avec compunction et abondance de larmes: non dementant le Prestre, mais avouant que le jugement estoit equitable […]”.\(^{86}\) After a poena that lasted eight months and during which there was not a single moment of joy or laughter but rather continuous tears and lamentations (“se lamentant, et plorant perpetuellement”), Theodosius I had been absolved by Ambrose and had resolved to persevere in his contrition with humble prayers and remorse in order to “boire la honte en personne”\(^{87}\) for the role he had played in the massacre of Thessalonica. Henri IV, to be sure, represented the antithesis of this model for Boucher: “Car qu’elle demonstration de penitence, soit d’austerité exterieure, soit de dimission de grade et seigneurie [avait-il fait] ? Quelle cendre ? quelle haire ? Quels jeuxnes ? Quelles larmes ? Quels souspirs ? Quelle nudité de pieds ? Quels frapemens de poictrine ? Quel visage baissé ? Quelle humilité de prieres ? Quelle prostration par terre, en signe de penitence ?”\(^{88}\) Indeed,

\(^{85}\) This position was hardly canonical, but Leaguers tended to ignore this detail.

\(^{86}\) Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 338.

\(^{87}\) *Ibid.*, 339.

what had made Theodosius’s satisfaction particularly important was that he had known
how to perform it in the appropriate manner by exhibiting his complete humility:

[Théodore était] prosterné de son long, la face contre la terre nuë: et disant avec
souspirs, non un petit (OUY) entre les dents, mais tout clair et tout haut, ceste
humble et devote priere, mon ame est fichée contre terre, rend-moy la vie selon ta
parole, s’arrachant les cheveux, et frappant le front, et arrousant le pavé de ses
larmes […] Quelle different marque, et demonstrations de penitence, au regard de
celly-cy [la pénitence d’Henri IV]! Et si ce masque de conversion, en a fait plorer
quelques-uns, quelque ridicule qu’il fuss, que eusse esté s’ils y eussent veu, la
contenance d’un Théodore?89

Porthaise, who made a similar assertion, was also persuaded that the king should perform
a long and painful satisfaction—one that would last at least two years—if he were to
prove himself worthy of receiving absolution:

Quand à la penitence [de Henri IV], Nous la voyons en parolles, non en œuvres,
comme jeunnes, larmes, affliction de corps, veilles, oraisons sans interruption,
aumônes ordinaires, en contemnement des plaiseirs de ce monde ; En se retirant
de ses vanitez durant le temps de la penitence, En se protestant par effect indigne
d’assister et participer, les choses Sacrées, elle n’a rien de semblable à celle de
David, et de Theodose, mesme elle n’approche point de celle d’Esau et d’Achab
et pour ce est incapable d’obtenir absolution.90

For the Franciscan, Henri IV’s satisfaction not only paled in comparison with the
“perfect” repentance of king David and Theodosius I, but was also inferior to the
“imperfect” one of Ahab—which, as we have seen, was short lived—and of Esau, who
sold his birthright to his twin brother, Jacob, in exchange for a bowl of porridge and then
later repented for it.91

89 Ibid., 339.

90 Jean Porthaise, Cinq Sermons, troisième sermon, 33.

91 Interestingly, we see yet again another example of the ways in which the ascetic model of penance
popularized during Henri III’s reign continued to bear its influence in the years following his assassination.
Jean Porthaise assumes that Henri IV should adhere to a form of penance conventionally only practiced by
ascetic monks associated with austere religious orders.
If Leaguers were upset with the king’s satisfaction and insisted that he perform acts of mortification, it was because, unlike Theodosius I, who had humiliated himself publically and demonstrated his resolve to amend himself in advance of his absolution, Henri IV had from the start staged his repentance as a joyous celebration:

Les gens de guerre embastonnez, les fifres, les tambours sonnans, l’artillerie et escopetterie, les trompettes et clairons : la grande suite de Gentils-hommes, les Damoiselles parées : la delicatesse du penitent, appuyé sur le col d’un mignon, pour le grand chemin qu’il y avoit à faire, environ de cinquante pas, depuis la porte de l’Abbaye, jusqu’à la porte de l’Eglise : la risée qu’il fit, regardant en hault, avec un bouffon, qui estoit à la fenestre, luy disant, en veux tu pas estre ? le ders, l’appuy, les oreillers, les tapis semez de fleurs de lys, l’adoration faite par les Prelats, à celuy qui se devoit submettre, et s’humilier devant eux, sont-ce les traicts de penitence ? Ou qui en veit jamais de semblable ?

The trill of fifes and resounding drum rolls, the discharge of gunshots and artillery, the blare of trumpets and bugles, the noblemen and luxuriously dressed damsels unabashedly displaying their rank and wealth as they marched towards Saint Denis: the ceremony, as Boucher describes it here, resembled more of a festive royal military parade than of a pious penitential procession. The anecdote of Henri IV calling up to a buffoon at a window—likely invented by Boucher—to ask him whether or not he wanted to join in on what could only be read as a farce ("en veux-tu pas [y] être") is telling. The theologian wanted to cast Henri IV as a second-rate actor whose immodest performance belonged more to a street comedy than to the sacred ritual he was about to partake in. By calling attention precisely to this irreverence, Boucher was reminding his readers of the king’s failure to adopt a proper and sincere attitude of compunction: rather than climbing the steps of the Basilica in a solemn and dignified manner at the end of a long period of self-

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92 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 337-338.
punishment and humiliation, as Theodosius had once done, Henri IV, as the Leaguers understood it, had made light of the ceremony and denied it all gravity.

Of course, Royalists had an entirely different perception of the king’s demeanor during the ceremony and the moments that led to it. Most thought it entirely fitting that he and his entourage be lavishly dressed and that the procession to the Church resonate with a celebratory spirit:

Sa Majesté revestue d’un pourpoint et chausses de satin blanc, bas à attaches de soie blanche et souliers blancs, d’un manteau et chapeau noir, assistée de plusieurs grands princes et seigneurs, officiers de la couronne, et autres gentilshommes en grand nombre convoqués par Sa Majesté pour cet effet, des Suisses de sa garde, le tambour battant, les officiers de la prévosté de son hostel, ses autres gardes du corps, tant Ecossois que François, et de douze trompettes, tous marchans devant luy, fut conduite depuis la sortie de son logis jusques à la grande église dudit Saint-Denis, très richement préparée de tapisseries relevées de soie et fils d’or pour la recevoir, où les rues aussi tapissées et pleines, et jonchées de fleurs. Le peuple, venu exprès de toutes parts et en nombre infini pour voir cette sainte cérémonie, crioit d’allégresse : Vive le Roy ! vive le Roy ! vive le Roy !

The white doublet, trousers, hose, and shoes symbolized the king’s spiritual awakening and purification, and the opulently decorated Church and streets attested to the venerability and piousness of his conversion. What better way to represent the sanctity of the king’s return to Catholicism than by a pompous staging of royalty, military power, and wealth? Royalists believed that a public display of censure (poena) would have been ill suited. Responding to the arguments of Leaguers, who were convinced that Henri IV should, regardless of his social rank, pay the penalty for his offenses, they argued that, on the contrary, lowering himself in front of the people in order to fulfill an ecclesiastical

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93 Discours des cérémonies observées a la conversion du très grand et très belliqueux prince HENRY IV, Roy de France et de Navarre, A la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine, in Louis Lafaist’s et Félix Danjou’s Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France (série I, tome XIII, 354).
sentence did not become the *dignitas* of a prince.\textsuperscript{94} If any works of satisfaction were to be carried out by the king, they were to be performed discreetly and privately.\textsuperscript{95}

Unanimously displeased as they were with the general performance of Henri IV’s satisfaction, Leaguers at times seemed unable to decide on the specific nature of the punishment he actually deserved. Wanting him to be publically admonished for his crimes, they asked for a proper performance of public satisfaction. Yet, they also felt that the gravity of the king’s violations was indeed too great and that no penalty could ever be sufficient compensation for the ways in which he had offended God and France. Dorléans’s comments reflect such a position:

> Et sera-il dit que tout cela s’efface, en disant trois Pater noster et autant d’Ave Maria ? et que ce Pape de la Sodome de Geneve, ce grand Pontife de la Babylone schismatique le reçoive en l’Eglise, sans montrer le moindre petit signe de poenitence et de satisfaction ? Quand il n’y aurait que l’heresie, qu’il a establie en la France, et tant d’amies qu’il a perdues, quelle satisfaction peut-il faire envers les hommes ?\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{94}“Car si vous alleguez, que ces rigueurs ne sont pour les Roys, ce sera *recocta crambe* [twice-boiled cabbage], comme l’on dit, pource qu’il y a ja esté respondu. Tant pour ce qu’on nie qu’il soit Roy, que pour ce que les Roys ne sont espargnez, pour s’humilier de la sorte, je d’y pour l’exterieur.” (Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 338) : “[…] les peines [sont] deuës aux heretiques, quand bien ils seroient convertis, quelques Princes et grands qu’ils soient […]” (328)

\textsuperscript{95}In the Royalist account given by Claude Gouyne, after his confession, Henri IV returned “*au siége qui lui estoit préparé devant ledit grand autel, pour ouïr la grande messe du Saint-Esprit* […]”,\textsuperscript{95} observing the rest of the liturgical service like his “*prédecesseurs Roys.*” Although he continued to show enthusiasm for his new faith in the subsequent days after his conversion, such as attending Mass daily, visiting different churches in Paris, and meeting important religious figures, no texts (that I am aware of) depict him carrying out a truly public *poena* afterwards. It does however seem to be implied by Royalists that he would have performed at least a few prayers in the privacy of his bedchamber.

\textsuperscript{96}Louis Dorléans, *Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete*, 138-139. “Parlons maintenant de la Satisfaction qu’il a faite, si tant est, qu’il puisse faire en ce monde suffisante satisfaction. Il a esté trente six ans et plus a commettre toutes sorte de crimes, tant contre le Ciel, que contre les hommes, les uns selon l’infirmité de nature, les autres contre nature, et toutes fois ce qu’il fait en trentes six ans, Monsieur de Bourges comme avec une esponge l’efface en un moment, *sans qu’il soit subject à restitution, ni à satisfaction aucune.*” (137, my emphasis)
Other Leaguers expressed the same idea. If an excommunicated ruler like Philip II of France had not been able to be absolved and released from his censure, states Boucher, and others like him who had committed “d’autres fautes moins griefves,”\(^\text{97}\) how could Henri IV? Since he had been excommunicated for heresy, his repentance should be more pronounced and his penalty (poena) should be graver and not merely expiatory in the typical manner of making satisfaction for the wrong done. The king’s offenses had not only rendered him undeserving of pardon, but also punishable by death: “[…] en matiere de relaps, ils ne sçauoient nier, qu’il n’y aille de la mort. Et que telles gens, tant par les Decrets, que par la pratique ordinaire, sont mis entre les mains du bras seculier, quelques penitens qu’ils soient.”\(^\text{98}\) No satisfaction could save him from the law and, if death was not enough, the greatest punishment of all still awaited him: “Pour estre ce crime [d’hérésie] si grand, que n’ayant d’expiation suffisante en ce monde […] il est necessairement reservé au feu eternel. Et en attendant, ne sera gratifié ny allegé d’aucune penitence.”\(^\text{99}\) Porthaise followed a similar line of argument. Agreeing with the belief of many in the Church, he was convinced that certain crimes, such as witchcraft, heresy, and apostasy were beyond forgiveness.\(^\text{100}\) Henri IV’s offense was in fact

\(^{97}\) Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 330.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 330.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 331.

\(^{100}\) At times, Porthaise claimed that “[…] l’Eglise ne doibt jamais refuser le giron au penitent” (Cinq Sermons, Sermon 1, 10). Even if he assumed that heretics were most likely damned, he stated that God would not have rejected the effort of their penance: “Et pource, tels pecheurs devoient vivre en perpetuelle penitence, que Dieu ne rejette point.” (Portaishe, *Cinq Sermons*, Sermon 3, 30-31). He even seemed to be persuaded that there was some possibility of admitting the king back into the Church provided the pope gave him his permission and that he performed a long public penance, one which would allow the
“tellement grieve, qu’elle ne se pouvoit remettre, que par Dieu seul.”

Both Boucher and Porthaise, reflecting on Henri IV’s satisfaction, ended up claiming that, because he was an Apostate, no amount of penitence could ever suffice to legitimate his accession to the crown: “Et par le droit civil, tout Apostat est incapable d’estre remis en ses Estats, nonobstant toute penitence.”

He was now like the miserable Esau who had lost his birthright, which no amount of repentance could help him earn back: “Ceste penitence donc n’est suffisant pour restituer la Couronne au penitent, non plus qu’à Esau sa progeniture, car il vint trop tard, avec sa venaison, la punition ayant esté decretée.”

Intent on weakening the king’s political legitimacy, Leaguer theologians and pamphleteers focused with particular insistence on the part of the ritual of penance that related to the works of satisfaction, which they knew represented the moment in the Sacrament when a sinner would finally be rehabilitated and taken back into the fold of the Church and community. If, in the case of Henri IV, they considered absolution to be useful for the salvation of his tarnished soul, they were adamant that it did not mean that it should be used to the political end of giving him access to the throne, just as deposed kings could receive absolution while being denied a return to their previous political power:

community to properly judge the state of his conscience and the sincerity of his intentions. But overall, despite these claims, he returned more often than not to the position held by Boucher on this matter, believing that Henri IV could never truly be forgiven for his crimes.


102 Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la Simulée conversion et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon*, 330.

Quand aucun a blessé la piété, et dignité Royalle, comme par heresie, et tyrannie; et à ceste occasion le Sceptre est venu en débat, cela n’a empesché l’absolution au penitent. Mais le Sceptre luy a esté osté, en exeqration d’un crime si pernicieux: comme il a esté evident en Esau, qui comme prophane, et n’estant venu en temps opportun; a esté privé de la primogeniture Sacerdotale, Royalle, et Noble.104

Such an argument precisely brings us back to the theological-political question that lies at the heart of repentance: while in some instances the personal repentance of the king was seen as necessary for the good of the country and the community (Henri III, after all, as we have seen, had fashioned his government after a penitential model), here it was claimed that repentance for public crimes should be rendered ineffective in the political realm. A king whose crimes were so wicked and who was in need of such extreme penance was unworthy of the scepter. This shows that Leaguers understood monarchical power as something absolutely inseparable from the person of the king. Should he reveal himself to be the perpetrator of grave crimes, or as an Apostate, or a heretic, he would have to be deposed—no ceremony of penance and purification could restore him to the dignity of his function. The monarchy was here placed above everything else, including the person of the king.

The Limits of Penance’s Political Value

Upholding a rigorist version of the Sacrament of Penance in order to delegitimize Henri IV’s rights to the throne, Leaguers, as we have seen, made it a point to underscore

104 Jean Porthaise, _Cinq Sermons_, Sermon 3, 55. Pierre de L’Estoile noted that the priest at St-André-des-Arts was also convinced that the king’s dignitas was tarnished to the point that it could not be restored: “On me dira là-dessus que je n’appete point la conversion de l’herétique, mais sa mort. Au contraire je la souhaite et desire, et n’empesche point qu’il soit receu pour penitent en l’église. Mais pour Roy, je l’empesche, et plus de cent mil avec moi. Badaux que vous estes, qui ne connoissés pas que ce vieil loup fait le regnard seulement pour entrer et manger les poules.” (Pierre de l’Estoile, _Journal du règne de Henri IV_, éd. critique publiée sous la direction de Gilbert Schrenck, édité par Xavier Le Person, glossaire établi par Volker Mecking, Genève: Droz, 2011, tome II, 111.)
the many departures that had occurred in all aspects of the ritual—contrition, confession, 
\textit{professio fidei}, absolution, and satisfaction.\footnote{Strictly speaking, the \textit{professio fidei} is not a component of the Sacrament of Penance, but it would have been included in the repentance of a relapsed heretic, so it is crucial here.} Every facet of the event had been duly recorded, examined, dissected; every fault exposed, every theological point argued, every deviation, however minute, disputed. Such painstaking attention undoubtedly stemmed from Leaguers’ distaste and fear of seeing a Huguenot rule over France. They believed the Bourbon king’s repentance would eventually reveal itself as having been hypocritical, and that he would in fact soon begin to violently advance the cause of Protestantism according to the principle of \textit{cuius regio, eius religio}. The conversion and later \textit{sacre}, as they saw it, had the potential of creating a political and religious disaster that would affect all of France and Europe. In their bid to hold this looming fate at bay, they sought to impose their reading of the king’s repentance and conversion, casting discredit over it by arguing that it had been motivated by a desire to deceive the public and was in fact part of a strategy to access power.

Faced with the public success that the spectacle of Henri IV’s conversion had become, they tried to reshape its reception by reinforcing a rigorist understanding of the Sacrament of penance. They argued that the rite should have adhered to all of the rules laid out in the Council of Trent and their writings reflect an almost single-minded preoccupation with fixing its definition and its proper observance in a final and irrefutable version, one that would not allow for any leeway in interpretation and that would forestall any departure or adaptation. The Leaguers’ acute and unrelenting interest in the Sacrament and the fact that they went to great lengths in order to define the proper
protocol for its performance, making sure to violently censure any diverging interpretations, demonstrate that they invested this penitential ritual with a new kind of political-theological strength. They believed in its power and it was this intensification of the rite that bolstered the concept of repentance, both augmenting its sacrality and instilling it with a new kind of political authority.

At the same time, it is undeniable that a new fragility—inherent in the Sacrament itself—emerged precisely through these multiplied attempts to fix its form, expression, and definition. No matter how much Leaguers tried to assert its unalterable and absolute nature, the ritual unraveled before them, becoming instable, and fraught with contradictions. Perhaps the greatest problem they faced stemmed from the Sacrament’s incapacity to fulfill the truth-uncovering function they had assigned to it. When Boucher or Dorléans denounced Henri IV’s tears of contrition as crocodile tears, they were confronted with a difficulty that also plagued almost all of the texts written by Leaguers during this period and which was theological in nature—the impossibility of knowing the king’s conscience or anyone’s for that matter. A desire for transparency haunted their writings and at the same time was negated by them. They claimed that the king did not feel repentance and yet their argument relied partly on the impossibility of accessing a person’s soul. Even after the narrator in Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete, for example, acknowledged that no one could know the thoughts or heart of another, stating that “les pensées ne peuvent estre transparentes par la lumiere plus vive, et plus ardents rayons du Soleil,”106 he still went on to claim that no man was “si reserré chez luy, ny si secret en ses pensées, qu’une meute de conjectures et d’indices comme de bon limiers,

106 Louis Dorléans, Le banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete, 49.
n'eslancent quelquefois, et qu’il n’en descouvrent l’intérieur.” Intent on building his case against the king and proving the insincerity of his penance, Dorléans was forced to uphold a paradoxical statement. On the one hand, it was impossible to know what was hidden in the farthest recesses of one’s conscience. Because of this, many people simply accepted the tears of the king, unaware of the fact that they were falling into a trap. On the other hand, Leaguers believed that they knew the truth of his conscience because they had figured out, by careful examination, that they were in fact crocodile tears. The king’s soul was opaque, he acknowledged, but it was still possible to know enough to decide that he was disingenuous and unworthy of the crown. This aporetic way of legitimizing the attack on Henri IV was not just an indication of the extent to which militant Leaguers like Dorléans were willing to go in order to prove their point; it also underscored a theological problem lying at the heart of the Sacrament’s first major component—contrition. Could the ritual be effective when a hypocrite could partake in it and make people believe that he truly repented? And if it could be instrumentalized by an unrepentant soul, why insist on upholding such a rigorist version of it as assurance of its truthfulness?

The inherent instability of the Sacrament of penance was thus made apparent precisely through the Leaguers’ efforts to control its form and content and to reduce it to

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107 Ibid. In order to justify his assertion that Henri IV’s contrition was false and that his conversion was strategic, he insisted that the reader examine the king’s heart: “[…] par une fonde et esprouvette tastons ses concavités, et fouillons jusques au profond de ses pensées […].” (63) Aware that Royalists would disagree with him and accuse him of meddlesome indiscretion and of having too much curiosity (a negative attribute during the Renaissance), or of presumptuously assuming to possess the knowledge of things only God could apprehend, the narrator circumvents these arguments, claiming that exposing the thoughts of powerful men like Henri IV is useful and even necessary because of the terrible consequences that their actions may have on a state: “Il ne faut donc pas trouver estrange, si on recerche les pensées des Princes devant que les recevoir en un estat, puis que leur puissance à faire bien ou mal est de telle importance, et que leur irreligion frappe de si grands coup contre la Religion.” (52)
a unique and invariable ritual. Albeit formulated differently and inscribed in a specific political situation, what they said about the ceremony at Saint Denis was to some extent a continuation of the old debates on the nature of contrition that theologians had had since the Middle Ages. Should contrition be defined as a single and pure emotion by returning to its Latin etymology, *contritus*, meaning “ground to pieces [from guilt]”, or should it rather be separated—as many scholastic theologians thought it should—into two ideas or related concepts—*perfect contrition* (a repentance motivated by a pure love for God) and *imperfect contrition*, that is, *attrition* (a form of penance driven by impure intentions, such as the fear of hell or of not benefiting from heaven)? The fact that Leaguerers made sure not to mention the concept of an imperfect contrition (i.e. attrition) in their texts is particularly noteworthy since it allowed them to advance their own arguments against the king without taking into account the fact that many theologians believed that a sinner could be absolved from his guilt even if his contrition was imperfect. Henri IV’s contrition could surely have been received under this category. As a result, their bid to restore repentance in what they claimed was its absolute form was constantly undermined by the debates of the theologians who had come before them, who were themselves submitted to the lability and instability of the concept. Subject to infinite debate, the doctrine of contrition could not be defined in categorical terms. Leaguerers had put all their stakes in the Sacrament of penance, and yet the more they wanted to make it absolute and pure, the less it seemed that they could rely on it as a means of uncovering the truth about the king’s penance. If the ritual ultimately could never be enough to absolve the king, why insist on it taking such a rigorous and inflexible form?
Confession was not the only element of the liturgy that posed a problem for Leaguers. The polemic concerning the other two theological components of the ritual—absolution and satisfaction—was equally challenging. Precisely as they tried to denounce the transgressions of Henri IV and his supporters, Leaguers were also exposing the ritual’s inherent theological contradictions and its impossibility of conforming to their interpretations of it. With each discrepancy they identified, it became clear that the rite was malleable, that canon law was inconsistent, that liturgical practices varied greatly and were subject to bias. The king could in fact be absolved *ad cautelam*. The jurisdiction concerning the power of the keys was debatable: it was possible for a French priest to preside over the ceremony and absolve the king instead of the pope. The degree, quality, and duration of satisfaction were also subject to variation according to the person who performed it (i.e. shouldn’t the king be exempt of acts of humiliation so as to preserve the *dignitas* of his function?).

When Leaguers discussed the details of Henri IV’s *poena*, it seemed that they implicitly acknowledged that the ritual had lost some of its power. Their inability to decide whether or not his satisfaction would be enough compensation for the crimes of the past suggests that the rite had in fact already lost its restorative function. The real problem was not the meager three *Pater Noster* and two *Ave Maria* said by the king, but the fact that, for Leaguers, no amount of *poena* could ever be enough for him to achieve atonement. In their view, the king was damned to an eternal death in hell. But this position undermined the doctrine itself: what spiritual and social function could satisfaction still have if it could no longer act as the balancing tool of God’s justice, and if the *idea* upon which it had been founded—that of granting sinners a path towards
reconciliation and amendment—was suppressed and cancelled out from the very start? The more Leaguers attempted to provide an absolute and steadfast definition of penance, the more it became apparent that what they really achieved was its slow deterioration. Weakened and destabilized, the ritual lost its power to produce change.

In this sense, Leaguers unwittingly participated in what seemed to have been, on the part of the king, a very conscious move away from the rhetoric of repentance that had pervaded the political sphere for so many years. Henri IV’s confession and professio fidei had been made without conviction. When Leaguers criticized his admission of sin, claiming that its brevity showed that it had not been grounded in a truly probing examination of the self (according to Boucher, it had only lasted a half hour and the majority of the conditions necessary for a good confession had been missing), they were also worried about the effects that such a half-hearted performance might have had on the public. Henri IV’s admission of guilt was too brief and remote to incite an important emotional response from the people. The terse form of his profession of faith (merely a paragraph or two) had a similar effect.108 Nearly all of the articles (seven out of nine, if

108 Here is the text of his professio fidei given by the Royalist, Claude Gouyne: “Moi Henry, par la grace de Dieu, Roy de France et de Navarre; reconnaissant l’Eglise catholique, apostolique et romaine, estre la vraie Eglise de Dieu, maistresse de vérité et hors de toute erreur, promets à Dieu et jure garder, observer et entretenir tout ce qui a esté arresté et déterminé par les saints conciles, canons et constitutions reçues en ladite Église, suivant les instructions qui m’en ont esté données par les prélats et docteurs qui m’ont assisté et les articles qui m’ont esté lus et donnez à entendre, et d’obéir aux ordonnances et commandemens d’icelle, et me départir, comme de fait je me dépars, de toutes opinions et erreurs contraires à la sainte doctrine de ladite Église. Promets aussi obédience au Saint-Siège apostolique et à nostre Saint-Père le Pape, telle qui luy a esté cy-devant rendue par nos prédécesseurs, et ne me départir jamais de ladite religion catholique, ains d’y persévérer, vivre et mourir, avec la grace de Dieu. Ainsi me soit-il en aide. Fait à Saint-Denis, le 23e jour de juillet 1593: Signé Henry. Et plus bas, Ruzé.” (F. Danjou,... et M. L. Cimber, Archives curieuses de l’histoire de France, série 1, vol. XIII, 351). In Discours des cérémonies observées à la conversion du très grand et très belliqueux prince Henri IV, Roy de France et de Navarre, A la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine, the description of the profession is even shorter: “Et à l’instant, à genoux, Sadite Majesté fit profession de sa foi disant: ‘Je proteste et jure devant la face de Dieu tout-puissant de vivre et mourir en la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine, de la protéger et défendre envers tous, au péril de mon sang et de ma vie, renonçant à toutes hérésies contraires à ladite Eglise catholique, apostolique et romaine.’ Et à l’heure bailla à mondit sieur de Bourges un papier dedans lequel estoit la forme de sadite profession signée de sa main.” (Ibid., 355)
one recalls the words of Boucher) had either been absent or been almost unrecognizable on account of their brevity, making this text an unconvincing assurance of his conversion. He strived to convince others that relapsed heretics were not allowed (theoretically) a second act of penance. Nothing, according to Leaguers, fitted the lengthy and emotional declaration that should have been required of Henri IV, with additional proofs of devotion and fidelity to the Catholic faith. In both cases—his confession and professione fidei—, it was the attenuating effect of the king’s rhetoric in the public sphere that so disconcerted Leaguers. Instead of using copia, amplificatio, and adjectio, his language and behavior were characterized by brevity and ellipse. His discourse appeared hasty, abridged, and nonspecific, as if repentance no longer really mattered.

Although his conversion and repentance represented one of the most spectacular events of the second half of the sixteenth century, it lacked the type of drama and theatricalization that the country had become accustomed to throughout the reign of the last Valois: Henri IV simply did not appear penitent enough. Likewise, instead of an exemplary staging of the punitive power of the Church, the whole ceremony had conveyed an air of royal grandeur and moral respectability. Rather than being governed by a rhetoric emphasizing the king’s faults (see also chapter four), which might have encouraged disapproval and even elicited acts of disobedience from the public, the ceremony had served to stage Henri IV’s royal dignitas. Instead of its usual retributive dimension, which made it a kind of public shaming and act of humiliation, especially in the biblical examples called forth by Leaguers, the Sacrament of Penance had been used as a display of political strength on the part of the king. If Leaguers had hoped to humiliate and disgrace Henri IV, they had been duly disappointed. In the end, they were
unable to use the conversion as a means to delegitimize the king and possibly quash his rise to power. On the contrary, his penance and conversion turned out to be a success for the Royalist camp not because, as it will become more clear in the next chapter, he performed the rite in the manner that Henri III or the exemplary Theodosius I did—that is, by parading his shame through the city in a spectacular display of public mortification and humiliation—but rather because he limited the dramatization of his penance to what was absolutely necessary. His conversion may have been grandiose, but when it came to penance, it was also marked by a perfunctory attitude that undercut the emphasis on shame and dishonor, which Leaguers hoped would weaken his power.

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In the end, what we see is a kind of double bind at work in the texts of Leaguers writing about the conversion of Henri IV during this period. On the one hand, they believed in the necessity of proper observance of the Sacrament of Penance: for it to be considered legitimate, it had to be followed à la lettre. Each component of the rite—contrition, absolution, and satisfaction—had to be sincerely experienced and justly performed. On the other hand, it was precisely this preoccupation with the lettre of the Sacrament that underscored its fragility. The liturgy had always been subject to diversification and interpretation. The kind of timeless and repetitive choreography of the ritual that Leaguers had expected was a fiction, for it had always changed according to different historical circumstances. The rite was not a timeless invariant and the traditionalism they had hoped to uphold proved impossible. The same instability was present in the language used by Henri IV during the Sacrament. His rhetoric of
abridgement, characterized by omission and *reductio*, served to undermine the solemnity and the intensity of the ritual. In the end, it appeared superficial and routine. The oaths implied in the rite did not seem to matter as much as they had before. The *ex opere operato* (“From the work worked”) aspect of the ritual no longer seemed in and of itself efficacious—that is to say that the rite had lost its power to act in a kind of automatic and independent way, free from the prejudices of its recipient or of the ministers presiding over the ceremony. Because Leaguers found it difficult and even impossible to look past the king’s crimes, the Sacrament could no longer serve as a rite of purification, allowing the passage from sinfulness to righteousness. Henri IV’s enactment of the institutional conditions necessary for the ritual discourse to be *recognized* as such, that is, to be received and accepted by the public, were ineffective for Leaguers mostly because—no matter what he did—they considered him unworthy of forgiveness and undeserving of the crown. Their fixation with his unpardonable guilt undermined the ritual’s capacity to act on its own behalf: it was no longer able to *guarantee* the king’s repentance and confirm that he was a true Catholic.  

Penance had limits. It could no longer truly serve to accomplish the process of amendment, forgiveness, and reconciliation. As much as Leaguers *appeared* to bestow the ritual with renewed power, it had lost a great part of its symbolic efficacy. Although they attempted to reinforce its legitimacy, it appears that, in the end, its political effectiveness was weakened since it could not be used against the king to undermine his authority.

109 The words of the Manant (the Leaguer) in the *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant* are telling of the inefficacy of the Sacrament to perform its function, albeit here it is the Sacrament of the Eucharist which proves limited: “[...] de dire qu’il va à la messe maintenant et à l’Eglise, ce n’est pas preuve suffisante pour conclure qu’il est catholique bien converty, parce que, comme dit S. Augustin, les parois ne font les catholiques, mais les actions de penitence qu’il n’a aucunement exercé, soit à la contrition ou satisfaction.” (François, Cromé, *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, 64.)
As history tells us however, this was not the way the king’s conversion was perceived by posterity, for it ultimately had been a success. No one could accuse him of betraying the Catholic Church anymore: he had fulfilled his contract and carried out the conditions of his conversion. The “social magic,” as Pierre Bourdieu might have said, appeared to function, ultimately leading the people to accept his penance. But how was it that so many Catholics, who shared in the Holy League’s mistrust of Henri IV, came to accept his repentance, which was a crucial step in giving him the political legitimacy he needed to succeed to the throne? If we are to understand his conversion at St. Denis as representing a crucial moment of his rise to power, we must ask ourselves how a shift in the perception of penance served to construct his authority and facilitate his political ascendancy. In the following pages, we will seek to understand what exactly the crisis in the interpretation of the Sacrament of penance meant politically, and shed light on some of its more lasting results into the turn of the century. We will pay close attention to the new discourse on penance that emerged after Henri IV’s conversion, which, as we will try to prove, was a determining factor in shaping the reception of his reign as we know it. How was it that, as Michael Wolfe has noted, “after years of acrimonious dispute and armed aggression,” people “eventually came to believe him sincere and acceptable as their king”?110 In our view, the political uses of repentance cannot be ignored if we are to provide a more complete answer to such a question. If epithets like the “Good King Henri” have prevailed, and not, for instance, images of a “penitent” or “remorseful” king, it is (at least partly) because Royalists during the sixteenth and seventeenth century were

able to successfully deflect people’s attention away from the problem of repentance that had been used to damage his political image and legitimacy. Rather than focusing on traditional arguments about the methods that facilitated Henri IV’s astonishing political ascendancy (i.e. his military strength, the creation of a powerful network of alliances and “obligés,” the use of bribery, etc.), we will thus explore some of the political strategies that he and his supporters used with regard to a rhetoric on penance and attempt to explain the ways in which it may have guided the people to accept his conversion in the end and not, for instance, put him on trial for heresy or force him to relinquish the throne.
In 1593, Royalists were already discussing the question of how later generations would interpret Henri IV’s conversion, drawing a clear separation between those whose memory would be irremediably stained, and those who would be forever honored by posterity for their loyalty in the service of France:

[...] celuy qui s’y opposera sera jugé desraisonnable, il en sera blasmé tout le temps de sa vie, et sa memoire sera honteuses et detestable à la posterité : Au contraire, la memoire de ceux qui s’emploieront loyaument à delivrer leur patrie du danger extrême où le malheur l’a precipitée, demeurera perpetuelle et tres honorable aux siecles à venir [...]¹

With the hindsight of a few centuries, the accuracy of such predictions and their conformity to common modern-day perceptions of the events appear striking. While the discourses and writings of Ultra-Catholic Leaguers, long deemed fanatical and extreme, have slowly been suppressed over time, those of Royalists have sometimes been received without much critical reflection, to the point that if their perspective more or less dominates today in the way non-specialists remember this particular historical moment, it is without the hesitations, contradictions, and subtleties that such sweeping statements

¹ Lettre escrite par les deputez des Princes, Officiers de la Couronne, et autres Seigneurs Catholiques qui reconoissent le Roy, pour la Conference faicte à Suresne, et autres lieux, Tours: Jamet Mettayer, 1593, 10.
about posterity were meant to occult. The conversion was in fact the object of numerous and complex debates opposing Leaguers and loyalist Catholics. It also endangered the unity of each party, notably, in the case of some Royalists, with the conspiracy of the *tiers parti*, whose members threatened to withdraw support to the king should he refuse to convert.² How this early, overly simplified assessment of the conversion, which opposed infamous Leaguers and honorable Royalists in the eyes of posterity, came to overshadow our reception of it is an interesting question which, taken as a whole, exceeds the scope of the present study. If we look at the details of the ideological wars surrounding the event, however, it becomes clear that repentance played an important role in the gradual imposition of a reading of it that still has currency today. In a way that is altogether different from Leaguers who, as we have seen in our previous chapter, insisted that the king’s penance was lacking and that his conversion was a sham, Royalists either sought to shift attention away from the question altogether, or to make penance part of a wider strategy aimed at fostering obedience to the monarch. We will see that the gradual erasure of the discourse of repentance in the texts of Royalists, and its replacement with a discourse on the necessity of obedience, constituted a crucial phase in the early development of the absolutist model.³


Henri IV’s Conversion: Constructing an Absent Penance

On July 25, 1593, donning a white doublet, white satin trousers, tights, and shoes set off nicely against his black coat and hat, Henri IV walked to the Basilica of Saint-Denis to abjure Protestantism and convert to Catholicism. Accompagnied by noble princes, seigneurs, and officers of the crown, he marched through Paris to the sound of beating drums and trumpets. The streets were carpeted with flowers and the people cried out Vive le roi as he passed. When he entered the Basilica, whose façade was draped in silk tapestries and festooned with golden thread, he was met by the archbishop, Renaud de Beaune, monseigneur de Bourges, who sat in a pulpit adorned with white damask bearing the arms of France and of Navarre. The archbishop asked him to state the purpose of his visit:

“Que demandez-vous? —Je demande, dit Sa Majesté,estre receu au giron de l’Église catholique, apostolique et romaine. —Le voulez-vous?” dit monseigneur de Bourges. A quoy Sa Majesté fit réponse. “Oui, je le veux et le désire.” Et à l’instant, à genoux, Sadite Majesté fit profession de sa foi […].


Love; N.M. Sutherland, Henry IV of France and the Politics of Religion (1572-1596), Bristol, UK; Portland, OR: Elm Bank, 2002.

What we see here is that instead of asking for forgiveness or abjuring his past errors, the king simply requests to join the Church. He doesn’t seem to be returning to the Church—an idea that would suggest his awareness and knowledge of having erred and strayed from the righteous path. Rather, he is represented as if he were joining it for the first time. It is almost as if we were reading the description of a baptism, and not that of a penitential ceremony. Looking at these lines, it is easy to forget that this first ceremonious exchange with the archbishop should have been—along with his confession and absolution—one of the main opportunities for the king to express his repentance both verbally and through his deportment. Instead, penance, as we see, is entirely evacuated from the scene. There was no explicit mention that the king had used any formula related to the concept. Equally missing in this text are the representations of Henri IV’s confession to the archbishop and of his absolution—the other two crucial moments of this ceremony when it comes to repentance. All we have are short descriptions in a tone that is more celebratory than penitential:

[sa Majesté est] conduite audit autel, où ayant fait le signe de la croix, baisé ledit autel, et derrière iceluy fut ouy en confession par ledit sieur de Bourges; où ce pendant fut chanté en musique ce beau et très excellent cantique Te Deum laudamus, d’une telle harmonie que les grands et petits pleuroient tous de joie, continuant de mesme voix à crier: Vive le Roy! vive le roy! vive le Roy!6

The king makes the sign of the cross, walks behind the altar (which protects him from the public’s scrutinizing eye), and while a beautiful Te Deum is sung and the people weep with joy, crying out “long live the king,” he makes his confession. There are no sorrowful tears, no descriptions of contrition. What is missing are precisely the elements of the

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6 Discours des cérémonies observées à la converison du très grand et très belliqueux prince HENRY IV, 356-357.
ceremony that had been deemed crucial by Leaguers in determining the sincerity of the king’s penance. Looking at these lacunae from the point of view of the Royalists, one could add that there is also nothing that might point to the monarch’s weaknesses or faults, no details that might undermine his authority.

In his profession of faith, the king swears to live and die “en la religion catholique, apostolique, et romaine,”7 to protect and defend the Church, and to renounce all heresies. Although the last element could be read as implicitly acknowledging past errors, it is the only detail suggesting as much—one that could also be understood as a simple formality associated with all ceremonial declarations of this sort. There are no explicit details mentioning the king’s faults, no personal accounts explaining how he erred theologically. While this last point might seem irrelevant to modern-day readers—wouldn’t it be enough to have the king convert in good faith and let the past be the past?—it certainly would not have been to those of the king’s contemporaries who remained preoccupied with the specific nature of his errors. It was well known that the monarch had held views opposed to those of the Catholic Church on transubstantiation, the place of purgatory, and the role of prayer in the intercession of the saints. The ceremony of his conversion inevitably brought up discussions about these theological “errors” among those who were concerned about whether or not he had truly amended himself. The fact that none of the official texts represented him recanting on any of the contentious doctrinal points—which perhaps could have quelled some of the doubts the people and the League had had with the legitimacy of his conversion—suggests that his party had consciously adopted a new strategy in order to impose his authority. In official texts, Henri IV’s conversion was generally sumptuous and festive, and the somberness typically

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7 Ibid., 355.
associated with repentance was nowhere to be found. If one discounts the period of fasting that preceded the ceremony and the few genuflections in it—actions that appeared to some rather perfunctory and not the expressions of intense remorse—the king was never portrayed as exhibiting the signs of suffering one might have expected to be visible in the mien of a troubled penitent. Those versed in the semiotics of mortification were left with nothing to look at: the king didn’t wear a hair shirt, didn’t flagellate or indulge in sorrowful prostration, nor did he show tears of remorse. Needless to say, this conversion stood in stark contrast with the spectacular ceremonies of penance that had been performed during Henri III’s reign and represented in numerous texts. While Royalist pamphlets such as the *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant* claimed that Henri IV had ceased all worldly activities for three days, worn black, and wept at the mere thought of his past faults (see chapter three), the official texts on his conversion didn’t bother with repentance. The strategy they adopted, in fact, seemed to be entirely opposite to what would have been expected: while for Leaguers the glaring absence of key aspects of the Sacrament of Penance implied that the king had been remorseless and his conversion insincere, the official accounts of the event written by Royalists, which were seeking to bolster his political legitimacy, were limiting their use of anything pertaining to penitence to what was absolutely necessary to the ceremony (i.e. his confession, profession of faith, and absolution).

This was in fact part of an attempt to suppress the arguments and disputes that had surrounded his conversion, as well as those that might appear later on. Insisting on his repentance would have drawn people’s attention to the king’s faults and forced him to be on the defensive. Official texts such as this one sought to circumscribe the controversies
around his conversion by censoring any public and ceremonial admission of past faults, thereby depriving his enemies of some of the fuel they needed to prolong their rebellion against him. Royalists seemed to be convinced that even evoking the king’s repentance would have been fodder to his detractors and helped them undermine his authority and the legitimacy of his conversion. By distancing themselves from the old logic of repentance that had governed politics for so many years, Royalists were refashioning not only Henri IV’s image, but also the theological concept itself.

Official discourses were not the only ones to erase certain expected references to the penance of the convert, denying it its traditional pride of place in the ceremony. Other texts written by Royalists also used a rhetoric of deflection, minimization, and omission in their discussions of his penance. They were, as we will see, keeping repentance at bay in order to pave a new path towards monarchical obedience.

Displacing the Discourse on Repentance and Ensuring Monarchical Obedience

In 1591, an important debate arose amongst Catholic Royalists after the publication of a controversial text entitled Remonstrance et Supplication faicte au Roy, pour la Religion Catholique, Apostolique, et Romaine. Speaking in the name of the Bordeaux parliament, and allegedly as a Royalist, the writer called for the conversion of Henri IV. However, instead of receiving wide support from other Royalists, the work elicited a number of negative reactions from those who found fault with the proposed

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rationale behind the conversion.⁹ Although they agreed with the author that Catholicism was the most legitimate faith and hoped that the king would convert, they declared that not all reasons were valid in persuading him to abjure Protestantism. Interestingly, just as it had been the case with Leaguerls, the question of Henri IV’s sincerity was at the center of their dispute. But if Royalists also insisted on the necessity of sincerity in his conversion, the conclusions they drew were diametrically opposed to those of their political enemies.

Leaguerls and Catholic loyalists both wanted his conversion to be sincere. Where they differed, however, was in their understanding of how sincerity could be translated politically. One of the main disagreements Royalists had with the Remonstrance et Supplication faicte au Roy concerned its proposition that the king should convert as quickly as possible. They remarked that it wasn’t as if he were being held back by some small trifle ("comme si quelque petite formalité le retardoit.")¹⁰ The stakes were much higher: “c’est sa conscience qui le retient, il ne veut rien faire en doute […].”¹¹ Of

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⁹ Although some Royalists—for example in Le vray Catholique romain contre le ligueur couvert—suggested that this writer, who claimed to be speaking in the name of the Bordeaux parlement, was not a Royalist, but rather a Leaguer pretending to be one, this seems a fragile hypothesis given the language of the document. Accusation a writer of being a Leaguer, it is important to remember, was a strategy Royalists used often within their own camp to unify their own discourses on the king.

¹⁰ Advertissement aux serviteurs du Roy sur la Supplication adressée à sa Majesté, pour se faire Catholique, 39. In Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion, one critic states: “Soustenez que le Roy se doit faire Catholic en poste et à toute bride, comme vous faites, s’il ne suit vostre conseil, plusieurs ames chatouilleuses estimeront que cela luy part d’un default de devotion, et qu’il a voulu entretenir ses fideles sujets de bayes par la promesse qu’il leur fit à son advenement à la Couronne, et par ce moyen serez paravanture cause d’un nouveau remuement de menage encontre luy.” (Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion, n.p.: n.p., 16.)

¹¹ Advertissement aux serviteurs du Roy sur la Supplication adressée à sa Majesté, pour se faire Catholique, 39.
course, many Catholic Royalists believed that the king would naturally convert to Catholicism once members of the Catholic Church had properly instructed him of his errors and he had come to accept their arguments: “[...] il desire que s’il y a, quelque faute en la doctrine, elle soit cagneue, et d’en estre si bien resolu, et instruict qu’il n’y ayt aucune occasion de la disputer. Cela faict il ne demandra point de ceremonie pour executer ce qu’il coignistra du service de Dieu et de son salut.”\(^\text{12}\) Because he was endowed with a virtuous soul, his conversion would come about in due time and would be genuine and definitive: “[..] il a l’ame trop bonne, et quant il se dira Catholique il le sera vraiment, [et] croira ce que nous croyons [...].\(^\text{13}\)” Forcing him to convert before he was ready, on the other hand, would be dangerous because it would promote a politics of duplicity. Becoming Catholic, stated a critic, was not simply like casting oneself into a mold: “[..] je vous dy que ce n’est pas une chose que l’on jette en moule.”\(^\text{14}\) The king’s conscience didn’t have the malleability of an object, nor was it constantly changing colors, like the skin of a chameleon or an octopus, to fit different situations and groups:

\(^{12}\) *Advertisement aux serviteurs du Roy sur la Supplication adressée à sa Majesté, pour se faire Catholique*, 39. After the death of Henri III, Henri IV also promised his Catholic supporters to bring together distinguished members of the Catholic clergy to hold an assembly in which he could be instructed in the Catholic faith. For more information, read about the conferences at Mantes and Suresnes.

\(^{13}\) *Le vray Catholique romain contre le ligueur couvert, Où il est monstré que nous devons tous prier Dieu de faire bien tost nostre Roy Catholique, mais que le discours imprimé sur ce subject soubs le tiltre de supplication, est un artifice de la Ligue et de ses pensionnaires, pour nous diviser, et consequemment perdre*, n.p.: n.p., 1591, 4. The king himself insisted that his conversion was sincere in several of the texts he wrote: “[nous avons] pour nostre regard apporté toute la sincerité de cœur de zele, et d’affection qu’il nous a esté possible, et pour les formes exterieures, toutes les reigles et ceremonies ordonnes de l’Eglise, et par les Saincts Decrets y ayans esté selon leurs degrez soigneusement observees : nostre instruccion nous ayant esté donnee à plusieurs et divers jours, par un bon nombre choisi de Prelats, des plus ainciens, et des mieux qualifiéz pour la probité, bonne vie, et pour la doctrine et coignoissance des sainctes lettres […] ” (*Declaration du roi [portant amnisite]*, Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 3.)

“Vous pouvez faire de vostre conscience un Cameleon ou Poulpe, lui bailler autant de couleurs que d’objets. La conscience du Roy n’est pas ainsi faicte […]”

Quite to the contrary, he claimed, he was an enemy of dissimulation and couldn’t imagine changing his faith only to fit political imperatives external to the workings of his soul:

S’il [Henri IV] l’eust [sa conversion] voulu traitter en courtisan, il se fust declaré Catholique sans instruction, sans devotion, et sans autre consideration de son salut et de sa conscience pour se reconcilier avec les ligueurs, lesquels en apparence le desiroient. Mais estant enemmy de l’hypocrisie et dissimulation du Courtisan, il ne peut se mettre en l’ame un changement sans raison. Et tient pour une maxime indubitable que ceux qui changent ainsi n’ont point de religion du tout.

Henri IV would not, like a fickle courtier, use his conversion for purely political motives. Whoever changed their religion out of political expediency had no religion at all and was but a disciple of Machiavel: “[…] qui change de religion pour l’utilité n’a point de religion pour tout. Tel Prince est vray disciple de Machiavel.” Indeed, it was because his conscience meant more to him than worldly affairs that he had insisted so much and so long on remaining Protestant. Not even for four kingdoms would he so carelessly trade

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15 Ibid., 23. “Il faut doncques que nostre Roy soit Catholic, parce que nostre religion est la meilleure : je vous dy de rechef qu’il le faut, mais non un Catholic d’Estat tel que vous le voulez former, c’est à dire Prince qui quittera sa religion, ira désormais à la messe, communiera aux jours solemnels avec nous au sainct Sacrement de l’Autel, pour contenter son peuple par beaux semblants, mais en son ame se mocquera de toutes noz ceremonies, et en ce faisant nous ferez un Roy sans religion, lequel auparavant en la sienne avoit toute sa confiance en Dieu.” (Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner advis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion, n.p.: n.p., 1591, 19.)


17 Response a la Supplication faicte au Roy de se faire Catholique, n.p.: n.p., 1591, 54; “Nostre Roy ne se gouverne pas ainsi : il ne peut suyvre vostre conseil pris de Machiavel qui s’ayde de vos mesmes exemples pour persuader à son Prince d’user de simulation en matiere de religion […]” (Le vray Catholique romain contre le ligueur couvert, Où il est monstré que nous devons tous prier Dieu de faire bien tost nostre Roy Catholique, mais que le discours imprimé sur ce subject soubs le tiltre de supplication, est un artifice de la Ligue et de ses pensionnaires, pour nous diviser, et consequemment perdre, n.p.: n.p., 1591, 4.)
his soul: “il ne le feroit pour quatre royaumes [...].”18 No worldly considerations would influence him to abjure Protestantism—neither the crown of France nor even that of the world: “il ne voudroit changer de religion pour la Couronne de France, ny pour celle du monde universel.”19 In the end, should he become Catholic, it would not merely be to please the people, but rather to insure that he would receive the ultimate crown in heaven: “[...] qu’il vienne bien tost en nostre Eglise, [...] que ce soit parce qu’il pense bien faire, et non pas pour nous plaire, que ce soit pour asseurer sa troisiesme couronne du ciel, et non pas les deux de la terre.”20

In the views of these Royalists, a hasty conversion, rather than reassuring the people, would make him lose all credibility: “[...] il perd sa reputation envers tous, et mesme moien au hazard de perdre foi et son Roiaume. Il ni a rien qui commande tant aux grands que l’honneur.”21 A reputation damaged by a dubious return to the Catholic fold would prevent Henri IV from exerting his political authority. Against those who claimed that his conversion would facilitate his recognition as king of all the subjects of France—all he had to do was to prosternate before the pope—many Royalists were convinced that

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19 Advertissement aux serviteurs du Roy sur la Supplication adressée à sa Majesté, pour se faire Catholique, 51. Henri IV would in effect describe his conversion in similar terms: “[nous] n’estimons nous pas que personne nous puisse imputer que nous y a ayons esté émeuz par aucun consideration temporelle : ny rien trouver à blasmer et redire en la substance, et en la forme de l’acte public et solemnel qui s’en est ensuivy [...]” (Henri IV, Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 3-4.)


21 Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion, n.p.: n.p., 1591, 27.
yielding in such a way would amount to handing in an easy victory to Leaguers: “Mais ce sera au Roy (dites vous) une belle victoire qu’il obtiendra dessus soy. Au contraire ce sera une belle victoire que ses ennemis obtiendront contre luy.”22 This appeared to them all the more true that it was doubtful Leaguers would be satisfied with the conversion and honor their promises: “[…] estimez vous les Ligueurs si gens de bien, qu’ils ne voulussent faulser leur foy?”23 If the king’s return to Catholicism, for these Royalists, was not the quick fix that some had made it out to be, it was because the problem was both religious and political. One only had to remember the way Leaguers had treated Henri III to know that being a good Catholic was not enough:

Vous pensez qu’il n’y ait que la Religion qui entretienne les armes en France : Quand les Villes s’armerent contre le feu Roy [Henri III], estoit-ce la Religion qui les convioit à ce faire ? y eust-il jamais Prince plus retenu en la Religion Romaine que cettuy la ? Car mesmes quittant le plus souvent le rang que sa Royauté luy bailloit, il s’aparioit avec ses subjects ; tantost representant un penitent au public, tantost se faisant demi-moine aux lieux reculez, pour exercer sa devotion : Et ne faut encore plus grand tesmoignage de cela, que la verite est qu’il seroit aujourd’huy plain de vie s’il n’eust eu toute creance aux moines.24

According to this particular Royalist, the penance of the Valois king had failed to bolster his authority. In fact, he had lost a large part of his majesty when he had donned the frock of the penitent. If Henri III—one of the most devout and penitent of all the Catholic monarchs—had not been able to quash the rebellion, there was no guarantee that Henri

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22 Ibid., 29.

23 Ibid., 31.

24 Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner advis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion, 32. See also Le vray Catholique romain contre le ligueur couvert, 9-10, 16, 23. “[…] repondez moy, le xij. May 88. Nostre deffunct Roy estoit il autre que catholique ? vouloit il oster nostre religion, quand vous et vos semblables feistes tuer ses Suisses, et armer contre luy ceste populace enragee en sa capital ville ? Vouloit il oster nostre religion cathoique quand vous l’avez fact declarer Tyran […]?” (Le vray Catholique romain contre le ligueur couvert, 9-10.)
IV would do so merely by converting. Here, the opposition between penance and obedience that underlies the whole discussion on sincerity becomes obvious: although they would never have said it outright, penance, for these Royalists, should never have had any political currency, which was why they had deemed it prudent on the part of Henri IV to have refrained from displaying any of its signs. Doing so would have forced him to enter into a misleading religious debate when in reality the problem was entirely political.

For many of his supporters, Henri IV’s change of faith would only come to pass if God bestowed His grace upon him. They hoped that “Dieu luy toucheroit le cœur, et l’inspireroit à donner ce contentement au commun souhait de tous les bons Catholiques.”

In Discours sur l’apparition des columbes blanches au haut de l’Eglise Saint Denis lors de la conversion du Roy, Gabriel Lurbe describes the appearance of doves at the St. Denis’s Basilica during the conversion ceremony as a sign that the Holy Spirit had indeed touched the king’s heart:

[Dieu] a voulu tesmoigner à toute la Chrestienté par l’apparition des Colombes blanches voltigeantes sur le portail de l’Eglise saint Denis lors de la conversion de Sa Majesté en ladite religion Catholique. […] C’est le bras du tout puissant, en la main duquel sont les coeurs des Roys, qui a fait ceste merveille.

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25 Declaration faicte en l’assemblee tenue à Suresne le dixseptiesme jour de May, Tours: Jamet Mettayer, 1593, 8.

Later texts published on his coronation in Chartres in 1594 similarly described the monarch as having been inspired “par la grace du Saint-Esprit à recevoir la religion catholique.”²⁷ Henri IV used the same terminology to describe it:

[...] nous ressentons en nostre ame un tel contentement, que nous benissons incessamment l’heure et le jour que ce bonheur nous est advenu : lequel nous jouissons avec autant plus de reverence, et en perpetuelle action de graces, que nous sçavons l’avoir receu de la seule bonté de nostre Dieu, par l’inspiration de son S. Esprit, qui a fait en cela un[e] œuvre de la divine providence si visible [...].²⁸

At first glance, these evocations of the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit on Henri IV’s heart seem to fall in closely with traditional ways of explaining the conversion process—essentially everyone claimed that God had to move the spirit of a person before they could convert. However, when we take into consideration the way in which Royalists repeatedly emphasized this point in their texts, it becomes clear that something else was at work. If some of them believed that the king’s conversion would come about from the guided instruction of eminent clergymen, many others claimed, particularly after 1593, that his conversion had been the work of a more immediate intervention on the part of God and was not ascribable to the operation of any worldly force. It was a miracle that surpassed all human understanding. This explanation was convenient for those who wanted to deflect any doubts concerning the sincerity of the king’s faith. Since no one

²⁷ L’ordre des cérémonies du sacre et couronnement du très chrestien roy de France et de Navarre HENRI IV du nom, fait en l’Église nostre-Dame de la ville de Chartres le dimanche 27e jour de février 1594, in Archives curieuses de l’Histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu’à Louis XVIII..., ou Collection de pièces rares et intéressantes, telles que chronicques, mémoires, pamphlets, lettres, vies, procès, ed. M. L. Cimber & F. Danjou, Paris: Beauvais, 1834-7, 1ère Série, t. XIII, 401-2. “Sa conversion miraculeusement advenue au grand contentement de Sa Majesté et de ses bons et fidèles sujets, et à la confusion du prétexte de ses ennemis, il fut prié [...] de se disposer à se faire sacrer, selon la coutume que les autres Roys ses prédécesseurs ont tousjours eue de procéder à leur sacre et couronnement bientost après leur avèvenement à la couronne [...].” (Ibid., 402.)

²⁸ Henri IV, Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 3-4.
had access to Henri IV’s heart, the question of whether his penance was sincere or not was out of the people’s hands. It was a phenomenon pertaining to the divine, a private act between the monarch and God, in which men played no part.

What we mean to suggest here is not that Royalists would have gone as far as to say that the Church should rid itself of the Sacrament of Penance or of other traditional rituals associated with repentance, but simply that their repeated references to the divinely-inspired nature of his conversion were politically motivated. By accentuating this particular theological understanding of the king’s conversion, they were trying to intensify its importance within the public sphere at the same time as they were weakening, even negating, the role that human interpretation could have in determining its validity. Claiming that they had no right in the first place to judge his penance was to undermine the very theological foundations upon which Leaguers were basing their accusations against the king—only God could know its true nature.

What are we to make of the different arguments used by Royalists when discussing Henri IV’s conversion, most of which have been obscured over time? If it has often been suggested that the king’s motives for abjuring Protestantism were mostly political—particularly in light of the quip “Paris vaut bien une messe,” which dominated the reception of his conversion—we see that some of the Royalist texts can serve to nuance and complicate this interpretation. Not only were Royalists concerned with the sincerity of Henri IV’s conversion, but their writings also sought to intensify the discourse on sincerity while at the same time minimizing the pertinence of his repentance. Because some of them preferred a Protestant monarch whose conscience was clear to a Catholic one whose conversion had been mere theater, one could argue that
they were insisting on sincerity to an even greater extent than Ultra-Catholics. Of course, Leaguers were also against a false conversion, but what set them apart from Royalists in this debate was that they would have never accepted a Protestant ruler, no matter how honest or virtuous he may have been. Ultimately, what stands out in the arguments developed by Royalists is the way in which they seemed to privilege sincerity above the question of religion and that of repentance. The fact that Henri IV was prepared to remain true to his religious beliefs and was unapologetic for his past was proof that he would be a loyal ruler, faithful to his word. Portraying the king as being so sincere that he would never have traded his religious beliefs for worldly power thus served another, more wide-ranging political purpose. At stake for those among Royalists who pondered the question of the repentance of the king and of his conversion was a change in the relation between religion in politics. Privileging the king’s honesty over his religion, sidestepping and even effacing repentance in the debates about his conversion, making the latter an act of God, were ways of avoiding being sucked back into the theological-political debates that had marred the previous reign. Repentance and its affects were clearly less important to these Royalists than political reliability and stability.

If they were trying to undo the theological arguments at work in Leaguers’ texts by effacing repentance from their discourses (without of course drawing anyone’s attention to the fact that they were doing so), it was thus to return to the old question of monarchical obedience. It was no secret that after the assassination of Henri III in 1589,

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29 In *Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner advis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion*, the writer, for instance, emphasizes the fact that Henri IV’s devotion towards Protestantism is proof that he is not duplicitous: “[Henri IV] recognoist Dieu de tout son coeur en la religion qu’il exerce, ce luy est une abhominaiton de le recognoistre par mines.” (*Ibid.*, 19)
the Bourbon king had struggled to obtain political legitimacy. Indeed, what all Royalists inevitably returned to in their writings was the necessity of submission to monarchical authority. They wrote on the conversion because they wanted to denounce the monarchomach Leaguers who were justifying sedition, rebellion, and even tyrannicide against the king in the same manner that they had with Henri III. In fact, in Royalist texts criticizing the *Remonstrance et Supplication faicte au Roy*, the rhetoric almost always shifts from a discussion of the king’s conversion to one on monarchical obedience. Above and beyond the question of his conversion and of his penance, Royalists were concerned with what a subject owed his prince.

Although there were a number of ways in which Royalists sought to promote monarchical obedience during the difficult interregnum years leading up to Henri IV’s conversion, one stands out in particular. In the texts they wrote against *Remonstrance et Supplication faicte au Roy*, they often invoked the famous Pauline doctrine of passive obedience by referring to the passage, in Romans 13:1, that stated that “every soul must be subject to the highest powers, for all power is of God. The powers that be are ordained

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30 Distancing the Bourbon king from the penitential persona cultivated by Henri III was crucial to building his political legitimacy. Along with minimizing the faults that the king could be accused of having committed, Royalist texts like the ones we have been examining also sought to create distance between the politics of Henri IV and those of the disliked Valois king from the preceding reign. It was no secret that, after Henri III’s assassination, Leaguers had transferred much of their hatred of Henri III onto the Bourbon monarch, something which pamphlets like *La sorcellerie de Jean d’Esperon, avec les lamentations d’iceluy, et du Roy de Navarre sur la mort de Henry de Vallois* make clear. Although most Leaguers sought to undermine Henri de Navarre’s right to rule by focusing on his “heresy,” they also, wittingly or unwittingly, adopted many of the same arguments and criticisms they had used with Henri III’s penitential practices to describe Henri IV’s repentance and conversion. There were two main criticisms of the Valois king’s penitential politics that tended to be transferred into the rhetoric of Leaguers and that Royalists tried to displace in their writings. We have already seen both of them: the first one concerned the king’s past faults and the second whether his religious devotion was sincere or not. For more information on the distinctions made between Henri III’s and Henri IV’s reign, see Michael Wolfe, “The strange afterlife of Henri III: dynastic distortions in early Bourbon France,” in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 10, No.4 (Dec., 1996), 474-489.
of God.” As Quentin Skinner has noted, it was one of most important biblical doctrines of the period, surfacing again and again in different contexts. Like many of the groups that had used it to advance their political agendas, Royalists exploited it in their writings in defense of Henri IV. Adopting a rigorist take, they claimed that any subject who resisted the commands of even a wicked king was sure to be damned, since any resistance to authority also implied resistance to God, who had ordained him.\(^\text{31}\) In *Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion*—a title which left little doubt on the writer’s view on obedience—it was explained in clear terms why it was a subject’s duty to love, honor, and obey the monarch, as well as to pray for his soul:

> Et pourquoi doncques? Parce que Dieu nous l’a baillé et qu’il veut que l’ayons tel, ou pour se vanger de nous à cause de noz pechez, ou pour esprouver nostre fermé en sa foy, ou pour quelque autre raison qu’il ne veut estre cogneue que de luy. Quand nostre Seigneur disoit qu’il failloit rendre à Caesar ce qui estoit à Caesar, quand sainct Pierre en l’une de ses Epistres, Sainct Paul aux Romains, et à Titus, commandoient aux Chrestiens de prier Dieu pour les puissances terriennes et leur obeir, ils sçavoient que tous les Roys, Monarques, et Princes de ce temps là estoient Payens […] ce neantmoins pour tout cela nous ne laissions de leur obeir.\(^\text{32}\)

It didn’t matter if the Huguenot monarch had been sent to them by God because he had wanted to punish them for their sins, or test the strength of their faith, or for some other unknown reason—the French people had to accept their new ruler and submit to him in the same way Christians had obeyed their pagan emperors. According to many Royalists, the true Christian who longed for peace and loved God would never incite others to rebel against the monarch. Leaguers, then, were the true heretics: “[…] c’est une detestable


\(^{32}\) *Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion*, 12.
No matter what faith Henri IV would ultimately choose (for in 1591 it was still unclear if he would abjure Protestantism), his subjects were not dispensed from obeying him and they especially did not have the right to depose him. The shift we have tried to underscore—from a discussion of the king’s conversion and the sincerity of his repentance to one on the obedience due to him—had great political implications. As we will see, it was part of a larger strategy on the part of the king and of the Royalists to construct a new understanding of sovereignty, one that prepared the later absolutist model. We must now examine how other texts by Royalists assisted in the slow erasure of repentance in favor of that of obedience.

**Fictions of Repentance: Royalists Ventriloquizing Leaguers**

In order to deflect attention away from the question of Henri IV’s repentance, some Catholics in the Royalist camp chose a more roundabout way than simple erasure. They argued that Leaguers were the ones who needed to perform penance more than the king. One text stands out in particular because of the way in which it sought to shift the obligation of repentance—*Le Ligueur repenti*. Published in 1595, this sixty-page work is a confession of guilt and repentance written under the name of Claude de Trellon, a poet who had been known for his role as a soldier on the side of the League during the battles

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of Coutras (1587), Arques (1589), and Ivry (1590). What makes this text interesting, apart from the fact that it deals directly with the question of repentance, is the fact that it was a forged confession. Although it was presented as having been written by “le sieur de Trellon,” it was in reality a counterfeit supplement to an authentic text entitled *L’Hermitage du sieur de Trellon...Avec ses Regrets et Lamentations*, published two years earlier, in which the poet had discussed his hesitations about whether to continue the life of a soldier or trade the sword in for the frock (“changer mon espée à un froc”), a step that he ended up never taking. Central to his meditations on the vanity of the world had been his desire to perform constant repentance: “Je veux changer ma vie en une repentance, et de tous mes pechês faire la pénitence [...].”

De Trellon, who had been proud of *L’Hermitage*, was prompt to deny authorship of the *Ligueur repenti*. In *Le Cavalier parfait, dedié à Monseigneur le Duc de Guise*, he shared his dismay with his readers and warned them not to be misled by the imposture:

Mon amy [le lecteur] s’il est permis de se plaindre avec beaucoup de sujet, je me pleins d’un Ligueur repent qui a esté imprimé sous mon nom, je le desavoüe et baise les mains à celuy qui la fait mettre en lumiere en ceste sorte.

*Tu augmentes mes vers tu gastes mon ouvrage, Tu te sers de mon nom pour me faire un outrage : Meschant il n’en est rien et tu en as menty, J’escris mes passions sans blasmer les personnes, Et ne leur donne pas le nom que tu leur donnes : Car je fus bien Ligueur mais non pas repent.*

De Trellon’s reaction to the publication of *Le Ligueur repenti* is remarkable. His overt admission of *impenitence* for having once been a Leaguer (“je fus bien Ligueur mais non

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pas repenty”) was a bold position to adopt given the political context in which he wrote. After his conversion to Catholicism in 1593 and the Surrender of Paris in 1594, Henri IV had officially risen to power. Those who continued to identify with the Holy League were subject to censure and punishments from the courts. In fact, a royal ordinance had decreed in 1594 that all “scandalous and defamatory books should be seized by the commissioners Le Norman, Pepin, and Desmaretz and burned at the Place Maubert and the Croix de Tirouer by the executer of high justice […]”.36 Pierre de L’Estoile mentions how the works of the most militant Leaguers, such as Jean Boucher and Louis Dorléans, had been publicaly burned on this occasion: “Les ouvrages de Boucher et Dorléans furent brûles en public.”37 Even if he was not writing directly against the king, as Boucher and Dorléans had done, De Trellon, by claiming in 1595 that he refused to repent or show the slightest contrition for his past as a soldier of the League, would have put himself in an uncomfortable position (but perhaps, like many Leaguers during the period, he was hoping that the war with Spain would end Henri IV’s reign before it had really begun).

“Tu augmentes mes vers tu gastes mon ouvrage, Tu te sers de mon nom pour me faire un outrage”: De Trellon understood how the Ligueur repenti, for those who failed to detect the imposture, had the potential of entirely derailing the reception of his work. Having created a fictionalized confession using De Trellon’s name, the anonymous writer had politicized his repentance in a way that had never been intended, transforming him into a spokesman for a new figure emerging in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion—


that of the repentant Leaguer. As its textual details and content make evident, this work was a clever forgery written by a Royalist Catholic trying to turn De Trellon’s very anodyne meditation on repentance in *L’Hermitage* into a political pamphlet. It functioned differently than works such as *La Satire Ménipée*, in which readers could find passages overtly ridiculing the penance of Leaguers. If De Trellon was particularly piqued by the way in which this publication politicized his repentance, targeting Leaguers and turning his purely theological gesture into a theological-political one, it was in part because the writer’s imposture had seemingly been successful. Despite clues and stylistic exaggerations that point towards pastiche, the tone was not so satirical that all readers would have picked up on the forgery. It seems probable, in fact, that many would have believed this was the “true” confession of a Leaguer. Indeed, the brilliance of *Le Ligueur repenti* is precisely its virtuoso ambivalence, and the fact that it is both mocking the Leaguers’ obsession with repentance *and* calling for them to repent. But what kind of penance did the writer call for and how did it act as a tool for deflecting criticism away from the question of Henri IV’s repentance?

In *Le Ligueur repenti*, the ventriloquized De Trellon is at first shown suffering the turmoil of a conflicted conscience, both conscious of his sins, yet incapable of abandoning his old ways:

Hélas ! que de debats travaillent mes esprits,
Que de soucis ensemble ont mon cœur entrepris :
Mets moy dans le tombeau, fay moy reduire en poudre
Seigneur, je n’ay jamais une heure de santé,
et mon esprit se trouve en telle extremité
Qu’il ne sçait que penser, ny à quoy se resoudre.

II.
L’honneur veut que je meure, et vive en se party,
Par devoir j’en devrois estre desja sorty,
Je combats contre toy, contre ma conscience,
De cela j’en suis seur, je n’en ignore rien.
C’est bien estre pecheur que de le sçavoir bien,
et de perserverer encor en son offense.38

The six years De Trellon had spent with the Holy League had inured him to his own moral depravity (“Avoir esté six ans en mon vice endurcy”39), but not enough to allow him to entirely silence the inner voice of his conscience. There is obviously an element of delectation in the way the forger, amplifying the usual incendiary rhetoric used by Leaguers in their calls for repentance, describes a soul in the thralls of inexpiable guilt:

Seigneur pardonne moy si mon cœur esgaré
A sans te recognoistre icy tant demeuré,
Ains a perserveré toujours en son offence :
Le dueil que j’en ay faict, l’ennuy que j’en ressens
Me donne de douleurs et de tourments si grands,
Que je n’ay pas besoing de plus grand’ penitence. […]
Je confesse ma faute, ô Dieu pardonne moy,
Je suis tout transporté de douleur et d’esmoy,
Jamais ny nuict, ny jour mon esprit ne repose […].40

De Trellon’s past becomes something that everyone can see: “Je suis toujours coupable,
et suis toujours infect, / Mes pechez se sont faicts, voir, ouyr, et entendre / Par mes deportements un chacun les a veu, / Par mes sales propos le monde les a sceu, / Ainsi je ne m’en puis ny laver, ny defendre.”41 The awareness of carrying an inerasable stain is here what drives repentance:

Je ne m’en puis laver, c’est de quoy je me plains,

38 [Claude de Trellon], Le Ligueur repenti, sieur du Trellon, Lyon: Thibaud Ancelin, 1595, 3.

39 Ibid., 33 & 6.

40 Ibid., 32.

41 Ibid., 21.
C’est pourquoy mes deux yeux sont de larmes tous pleins
C’est le ver qui me ronge et qui me gesne l’ame,
Qu’un François ay voulu tant de honte encourir!
O Dieu le coeur m’en saigne, ô Dieu je veux mourir.
Car ce n’est pas honneur de vivre avec ce blasme.  

The fictional De Trellon is bearing his stigmata on his face, and his failure, humiliation and shame are legible to all: “De Ligueur que j’estois je suis devenu gueux, Je n’y songe jamais que mon teinct ne rougis.”43 He must give up all hope that his lost honor will ever be restored: “Quand pourray-je sans crainte aller haute la teste ? Jamais au grand jamais : l’horreur de mon peché / Faict que je tiens tousjours l’œil en terre fiché, / Si fort me rend honteux la faute que j’ay faicte.”44 His downcast eyes suggest the most visceral shame and penance. Denouncing the fabricated text, De Trellon was right to say that he, contrary to the impostor, had written of his desire for personal penance without implicating other persons: “J’escris mes passions sans blasmer les personnes.”45 The descriptions of De Trellon’s penance and shame, in the forged confession, were indeed meant to apply to all Leaguers.46 Although the Holy League had once been powerful, it

42 Ibid., 33. My emphasis.

43 Ibid., 46.

44 Ibid., 20.

45 Claude de Trellon, Le Cavalier parfait, dédié à Monseigneur le Duc de Guyse, Lyon: Thibaud Ancelin, 1595.

46 Reasons for shame included De Trellon’s participation in the battle of Coutras, Arques, and Ivry as a Leaguer—all battles that were against Henri de Navarre: “Tombeau de mes amis, Coutras triste memoire, / Où tant de Chevalliers monstrarent les talons, / Arques, où les Ligueurs s’armoyent des esperons, / Que vostre souvenir m’apporte peu de gloire. / Ivry, où sans manger on fit tant de gens boire, / Où les plus mal montez demeurarent à fonds / Vous en fustes tesmoings, vous Reistres et Vallons, / Fuir honteusement ce fut vostre victoire” (Ibid., 51)
too should now bow its head in shame: “La ligue glorieuse a regné tout un temps, maintenant elle baisse honteusement la teste [...]”\textsuperscript{47} Leaguers were sinners whose disgrace was so great that even death seemed more desirable than their diminished political afterlife and their ingratitude toward those who let them live: “Mourez, mourez de honte, ingrats sans sentiment, / Ingrats privez de cœur, d’honneur, de jugement [...].”\textsuperscript{48} Not merely sinners who should sever their ties with society, they might better deserve to be hunted down and punished: “C’est qu’un jour vous serez contraints de vous cacher, / Et ne trouverez point pour courre assez de terre.”\textsuperscript{49} Ultimately, they were the ones to blame for the recent wars: “Vous portez la coulpe et la peine de tous, / On vous donra le tort de ceste injuste guerre [...].”\textsuperscript{50}

Failing to exert proper judgment, Leaguers had allowed themselves to err beyond all tolerable limits: “O insensez Ligueurs, ô peu de jugement, / Le Diable vous a bien à son commandement [...].”\textsuperscript{51} Children would have been less credulous, admits the ventriloquized De Trellon: “Ignorant que j’estois, privé d’entendement, / Les enfans de dix ans y voyoyent clairement, Et je ne pouvois pas avoir ceste creance [...].”\textsuperscript{52} If he had

\textsuperscript{47} Le Ligueur repenti, sieur du Trellon, Lyon: Thibaud Ancelin, 1595, 20.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 27.
at first joined the *Sainte Union* because of religious convictions, he soon had been led astray by its treacherous seduction: “Des le commencement que l’on me fit Ligueur, / Je pensois que c’estoit pour la Foy Catholique: / Mais comme l’on s’affine avecque la pratique, je changeaoy tout soudain de creance et de cœur. La Ligue est une feincte, une belle couleur [...]”\(^{53}\) Casting himself as the last virtuous Leaguer—precisely because he was able to repent—he claims that after his departure one will only find ignorance among his party: “Par mon despart la Ligue est vefve de vertu, / Et rien n’y peut regner maintenant qu’ignorance.”\(^{54}\) It is obvious that for the De Trellon that is staged in the Royalist text, the ignorance in question is that of the true Catholic religion. When Leaguers armed themselves against Henri IV, it wasn’t to preserve the Church, but to gain political power: “Le pretexte fut faux dés le commencement / Qu’a l’encontre du Roy lon s’arma vivement, / De dire que c’estoit pour conserver l’Eglise [...]”\(^{55}\) The repentant De Trellon turns back to his former self and only sees a traitor and rebel to the king, without law or religion to guide him: “Je seray donc tousjours traistre et rebelle au Roy? Je n’auray point de Dieu, je n’auray point de Loy?”\(^{56}\) His error was that of all Leaguers:

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\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*, 12. In *Declaration du roy* [*portant amnistie*], Henri IV denounces the Leaguers’ religion in the same manner: “[…] ceux d’entre eux qui ont esté tenus en ce pqrty pqr le seul zele de religion ou des qutres qui s’ent sont servis seullement de pretexte, pour couvrir leur malice et desloyauté. Car les premiers se re-uniront promptement à nous, et ne voudront plus estre de ceste semence funeste à la France, qui q nourry en eux comme les viperes les causes de sa ruyne.” (Henri IV, *Declaration du roy* [*portant amnistie*], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 17.)

\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*, 5.
Veux-tu sçavoir que c’est du serment de Ligueur,
Estre traistre à son Roy, loger dedans le cœur
Feindre de servir Dieu, n’avoir ny Dieu, ny loy,
Estre sans amitié, sans respect et sans foy,
Et ne vouloir garder ny ordre, ny Justice.\(^{57}\)

The old Leaguer now speaks like a Royalist, warning all people against his exemplary failure and the dangers of blindly following the League:

Et vous peuples mutins, peuples seditieux
Qui pour voir vos malheurs n’avez eu des yeux,
Voyez ce qu’on vous fit follement entreprendre.
Ceux qui vous ont poussé à chasser vostre Roy,
[words missing] ont mis au bissac, las! Voyez dequoy,
[words missing] un tel crime on ne peut que du mal-heur attendre.\(^{58}\)

The message is clear: being a Leaguer will eventually turn you into a humiliated beggar (it is the meaning of the expression “mettre au bissac”). The philosophy of the \textit{Sainte Union} had transformed people into uncontrollable beasts: “\textit{Vous les avez rendus hautain, injurieux, / Vous les avez rendus des Lyons furieux, / Insolents, indiscrets, sans nulle obeissance}.”\(^{59}\) In this mock confession of a repentant Leaguer, the party is blamed for having created a political environment of insurrection and disorder. Too accustomed to commanding others on the theater of war, De Trellon himself admits that he has become incapable of obeying: “\textit{mais le plaisir que c’est de commander / Faict qu’à obéir plus, je ne puis m’accorder} […]”.\(^{60}\)

\(^{57}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 47.

\(^{58}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 33.

\(^{59}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 27.

\(^{60}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 5.
De Trellon’s shame, in *Le Ligueur repenti*, also concerns his betrayal of France. His allegiance to the *Sainte Union*, he sorrowfully admits, had transformed him into a Spaniard: “Il faut être François et non jamais ligueur, / Mal-heureux le subject qui son Roy n’accompagne. / Moy qui suis nay François, je devienne Espagnol [...]”\(^6^1\) According to this account, the League had been the result of Spain’s political interference in French affairs: “Espagnol et Ligueur n’est qu’une meme chose.”\(^6^2\) Those who had called upon the aid of the Spanish monarch had shamefully brought ruin upon France, and were criminal in that they had jeopardised their country in order to gain a dubious political advantage: “Soyons, Soyons François: c’est une honte à nous / D’appeller l’estranger, et nous mettre à genoux / Devant luy pour en fin nous ruiner nous mesmes: / Qu’un seul Dieu, qu’un seul Roy soit nostre affection [...]”\(^6^3\) Philippe II was a tyrant whose goal had been to fragilize France and to keep it in a continual state of war, most likely in order to take the crown: “Il veut la guerre en France, et n’y veut point de Roy, / Ou bien il veut garder la Couronne pour soy [...]”\(^6^4\) The author of *Le Ligueur repenti* was here tapping into well-known material. During the 1593 États-généraux (also known as the États de la Ligue) that had convened for the purpose of resolving the crisis of succession after Henri III’s assassination, many pretenders to the throne had put forth their candidatures. Philippe II had proposed to marry his daughter, the Infante, Isabelle of


\(^6^3\) *Ibid.*, 38.

Spain (who was also Henri II’s granddaughter), to the Cardinal of Bourbon (the most legitimate heir to the throne after Henri IV). The Spanish monarch hoped that, should the Leaguers be able to abolish Salic law, Isabelle would become the queen of France and thereby extend Spain’s reach over Europe. With Henri IV’s abjuration of Protestantism, the project had quickly been abandoned. In his Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Henri IV himself refers to the Leaguers’ betrayal in this affair. According to him, they had not only refused to accept his conversion, even after he had granted them a truce in order to come to a peace agreement, but they had also colluded with Spain, thereby plotting against their own country:

Et puis qu’ils [Leaguers] n’ont point voulu comprendre l’intention de Dieu, en l’effet de nostre conversion, du premier jour de laquelle les armes leur devoyent tomber des mains, puis que aussi l’ambition et l’avarice sont en eux plus puissantes que la nature, ayans en faveur des estrangers, et sur l’appas des commoditez qui leur en sont promises, conjuré contre leur propre patrie: Nous avons resolus […] pour ne nous rendre plus coulpable de ces maux et indignitez, en les endurant: et que la coulpe d’autruy ne soit à nostre blasme et reproche, de ne leur accorder plus aucune prolongation de trefve […].

With the beginning of the Franco-Spanish War in 1595, Spain had become a renewed source of conflict. Le Ligueur repenti participates in the anti-Spanish propaganda of the period.

The forged text of De Trellon’s penitential confession didn’t leave Protestants out of the debate on obedience. They, too, had weakened the French state: “Les Huguenots aussi sont de fascheuses gens, / Ce sont eux les premiers, qui ont ouvert les flancs / A la France, depuis qui tousjour se lamente. […]” The spiritual blindness they shared with Leaguers had also led them to commit the crime of lèse-majesté: “Huguenots et Ligueurs

65 Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 16.

66 Ibid., 49.
vostre cause est mauvaise, / Ne parlons plus de Ligue, et moins encore de Beze, / Vous estes criminels de leze Majesté, / Qui est traistre à son Roy s’achemine au supplice […]”

The Royalist author of Le Ligueur repenti could delight in the fact that both Leaguers and Protestants were losing their political power. But he made sure to leave room in his text for the possibility of the repentance and conversion of Protestants, whose position he saw as being even more precarious than that of Leaguers:

Les Ligueurs maintenant sont proches de leur fin,  
Vous [les Huguenots] pourriez bien tomber en un estat plus pire :  
Car comme vostre mort tout le monde desire,  
On l’invoqueroit tant qu’elle viendroit en fin.  
Ne vous obstinez plus, allons tous à la Messe […]

This invitation to a reconciliation through participation in the Catholic mass was a call for all parties to show their obedience to the king. The ceremony, it seemed, would be marked by repentance.

Henri IV had set an example by abjuring Protestantism. He was the rightful heir to the throne, a true Frenchman, and a “bon Catholique”:

Est-il de nom plus beau que celuy de François,  
Nostre Roy n’est-il pas le plus grand Roy des Roys,

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67 Ibid., 49. Henri IV used the same idea in his Declaration du roy [portant amnistie]: “Mandons, et enjoignons à nosdites Cours de Parlemens, Baillifs, Senechaux, et autres noz officiers à qui il appartiendra, que contre ceux qui par leur contumace et opinastrété se rendront indignes de nostre presente grace, ils ayent à proceder, comme il est ordonné estre fait contre criminels de leze Majesté, au premier chef. Voulons, et ordonnons aussi que toutes les villes qui seront reprinse par force, soyent en perpetuelle memoire de leur desloyauté desmentelee. Et generalemnet que tous lesdits rebelles soyent traitez comme perfids à leur Roy, et deserteurs de leur patrie.” (Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 21.)

68 Ibid., 42.

69 Ibid., 11. As Michael Wolfe has shown in The Conversion of Henri IV: Politics, Power, and Religious Belief in Early Modern France, the credo of the “bon françois catholique” that was used by all political parties during this period was an important ideological weapon in the debates of the period.
N’est-il pas le premier en valeur, en caresse,  
Vous l’alliez accusant de la religion,  
Maintenant il n’a plus ceste contagion,  
Que luy demandez vous, va-il point à la Messe?"  

For the author of *Le Ligueur repenti*, Henri IV had already expiated his sin—going to Mass was sufficient proof of his repentance—whereas Leaguers were far from having even started on the path he had marked. Covetous of the throne, they continued to revolt for reasons that were no longer religious: “Ce n’est plus pour la Messe, helas! qu’on se debat, / C’est pour la Royauté que on vient au combat […]”  

Deploring his own late change of heart, the imagined De Trellon had recognized his faults and understood that the most important thing he could do was to repent: “Non, non, c’est faict, il se faut repentir / Et Faire ses regretz jusqu’aux cieux retentir […]”  

His repentance acted as an exemplum, showing Leaguers how to open their eyes to this truth: “Dessillez-vous les yeux, et venez avec moy / Chanter et rechanter ces vers de repentance.”  

De Trellon became a proselyte calling for the conversion of his fellow Leaguers to political sanity: “Seigneur, preste l’oreille à ma sainte priere, / Fay que tous mes amis se puissent repentir, / Fay que tous mes amis se vueillent convertir, / Affin qu’ils viennent voir avec moy la lumiere.”  

The Royalist who was writing in De Trellon’s name argued that

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70 Ibid., 14.

71 Ibid., 12.

72 Ibid., 6. “Bien tard à mon regret j’en ay la cognoissance, / Encore vaut-il mieux plustost tard que jamais […]” (Ibid., 12)

73 Ibid., 31.

74 Ibid., 40.
changing one’s political party in favor of the king’s was not a betrayal, but simple restitution:

Ce n’est pas trahison que de trahir un traistre,
C’est rendre à un chacun ce qu’il a merité.
Prends le party du Roy, rends luy ses Citadelles,
Ne laisse à tes enfans apres toy des querelles,
Ne persevere plus en ton opinion,
C’est luy qui est ton Prince, il faut que tu le croye […].

Replacing one loyalty with another was not perfidious behaviour if that allegiance was to be transferred to the king. The Leaguer’s repentance and their obedience to the crown almost seem here to be one and the same thing. What the text seems to be proposing is that the Leaguers’ penance will bring them to the realization that Henri IV is the true ruler of France. “C’est luy qui est ton Prince, il faut que tu le croye”: obedience to the king is the true faith. De Trellon echoes here the discourse of many Catholic Royalists who asserted that it was the penitent’s natural duty to obey, “car obéir c’est chose naturelle.”

All subjects who rebelled against the king had lost their honour and loyalty: “[…] C’estoit perdre l’honneur, c’estoit manquer de foy, / Ne recognoistre pas ce qu’on doibt recognositre.” They had forgotten that the sovereign, according to traditional

75 Ibid., 51.

76 Ibid., 22. “Sire, pardonnez nous si trop long temps ligueurs / Nous vous avons fermé la porte de noz coeurs […] mais or que nous savons / avoir trestous manqué à ce que nous devons, / Recevez les souspirs de nostre repentance.” (Ibid., 11) The writer of Le Ligueur repenti is in fact only reiterating what the king himself has said about the obedience of his subjects: “Nous exhortons Tous Princes, Prelats, Siegneurs, Gentilshommes, Officiers, Villes, Communautez, et generalement tous nosdits subjects qui se sont cy devant separaze de nous, et les conjurons au nom de DIEU, par leur devoir envers nous, et leur patrie, à leurs familles et fortunes, et de se departir de toutes ligues et associations, tant dedans que dehors ce Royaume, faictes au prejudice de nostre service, du bien et repos de cest Etat, et se reunir à nous : et par consequent au corps des vrais François, bons et fidelz sujets delur Roy, et Prince naturel.” (Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 18.)

77 Ibid., 30.
models of kingship, was divinely chosen: “les Roys sont ceux que lon regarde / Comme des Dieux en terre […].” Disobeying the king was like going against God. Pomponne de Bellièvre, also a Royalist, gave a similar argument: “Dieu ne veut pas approuver les armes des subjects, qui desobissent à leur Roy.” The way these Royalists used the doctrine of divine right, which was inextricably linked to the question of penance, differs from the traditional hierarchies of obedience it promoted. Here repentance seems strangely emptied of its religious content to almost solely signify obedience, as if the concept were being completely absorbed into a discourse on submission to monarchical authority. Of the theological definition, the spiritual gesture of contrition and sorrow towards God, little remained, all the focus having shifted to the public shaming of Leaguers accused of having betrayed their king and country. Having thus shed its theological dimension, repentance was, we might say, more political than ever.

The Dramaturgy of Power: Constructing Sovereignty Through Clemency, Repentance and Forgiveness

If the king himself was to successfully mobilize the dual scheme of repentance/obedience at work in some of the Royalist pamphlets, he had to tread lightly.

78 Ibid., 36. “Je ne veux pas brider la volonté des Roys, / Ils peuvent tout sur nous, ils nous donnent les Loix, / Ils ont le choix de tout, tout est en leur puissance […]” (Ibid.)

79 Michael Wolfe also points out that, after Henri IV’s conversion, “Catholics had to respect the integrity of Henri IV’s new faith because only God possessed certain knowledge of its existence in the king’s heart. Obedience to the converted king thus became a pious work, disobedience a sin.” (Michael Wolfe, The Conversion of Henri IV: Politics, Power, and Religious Belief in Early Modern France, 168.)

80 Pomponne de Bellièvre, Avis aux François sur la declaration faicte par le Roy, en l’Eglise S. Denys en France, le XXV jour de juillet, 1593, Lyon: Guichard and Thibaud Ancelin, 1594, 30. Bellièvre is discussing this idea in regard to the attempt that Leaguers made to elect another king during the 1593 États-Généraux.
His 1593 abjuration was fresh in the memory of his detractors, and he still had to convince many of his subjects that his own repentance was sincere and that he would not renounce Catholicism once he had gained control over the cities in France who still pledged their allegiance to the League. As many historians have shown, a few key events helped consecrate Henri IV’s authority in the beginning years of his political dominance, the most important being his conversion to Catholicism (1593), his *sacre* and coronation (1594), and his absolution by pope Clement VIII (1595). But other strategies were also being used under his government to solidify his power. Bribery or the selling of offices and titles proved effective: he was, for instance, known for having paid off some of the most notorious princes of the Holy League in order to guarantee their loyalty to him.

However, his use of clemency was probably one of the most determining factors in his success, the linchpin of a political strategy of reconciliation that profoundly shaped his image for posterity. The “Good king Henry” was extolled by his contemporary

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83 See Jacques Hennequin, *Henri IV dans ses oraisons funèbres ou la Naissance d'une légende*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1977; *La légende d'Henri IV: actes du colloque du 25 novembre 1994, Paris...*, [organisé par la] Société Henri IV, [Biarritz]: J. et D. and [Pau]: Société Henri IV, 1995. Here is merely one example taken from one of Henri IV’s many panegyrists—the Royalist Pomponne de Bellièvre, whose praise gives us a fairly good idea of what qualities were valorized in the late 1590s: “[...] nous voyons d’une presence et Majesté vrayement Royale, plein de bonté, clemence, et humanité, tres-prompte à prendre un bon conseil, tres-resolu à le mettre à execution, hardy, vehement, et heureux aux batailles, bening et moderé en la victoire, auquel nul effort de ses ennemis peut donner terreur, non plus qu’aucune passion de vengeance ne peut surmonter la benignité de son cœur, qui desire, principalement, de pouvoir remettre son espee au fourreau, à fin qu’il puisse faire regner la Justice parmy ses Peuples, faire vivre en repos, et tranquillité les trois Ordres de ce Royaume, conservant un chacun en ce qui luy appartient, et affectionant, comme il doibt,
panegyrists as the greatest leader of France, the clement monarch who brought peace to a war-torn France.

As Michael Wolfe has shown, Henri IV and his supporters were proponents of a politics of *douceur*: “The potent image of Henri IV as a devout and clement king emerged strongly in the subsequent campaign to win his acceptance as Catholic king.”

Rather than resorting to the harsh strategies he had used in the past, Henri IV sought this time to enforce peace by cultivating mercy, leniency and compassion, very much in keeping with the spirit of his own conversion and repentance. This politics of *douceur* symbolically culminated, we might say, with the Surrender of Paris in 1594. Although Henri IV had published, before his conversion, a number of official declarations

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85 “In the past, Henri IV had usually sided with the proponents of a harsh peace, though necessity had at times compelled him to allow talks with the League. After his conversion, however, Navarre slowly gravitated toward a lenient accord for reasons that are not difficult to fathom. A conciliatory approach could help dispel the warnings of apocalyptic doom sounded by radical Leaguers by extending to all his subjects the mercy God had shown the king during his conversion. After all, it was highly impolitic to treat the Leaguers in ways which contradicted the very spirit of his reconciliation with the Church. In this way, the exigencies of propaganda entailed in validating his sincerity helped shape how Henri IV approached pacification.” (Michael Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV: Politics, Power, and Religious Belief in Early Modern France*, 164.)

86 In the Royalist edition of the *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, we see an example of the politics of *douceur* studied by Michael Wolfe: “Nostre Roy est la douceur mesme, jamais un plus debonnaire ne porta couronne royale sur sa teste. C’est à faire aux Lorrains à aimer le sang espadu, les meurtres et divisions. Croyez que le Roy vous traitera doucement si vous devenez sages, sinon, à la verité, vous le forcez à estre contre son naturel un peu plus rigoureux et severe. Et si croyez que Dieu nous aidera, et que l’esperance est de nostre part, et non de la vostre.” (François Cromé, *Dialogue d’entre le maheustre et le manant*, Genève: Droz, 191)
announcing the pardon of all subjects on the condition that they cease seditious activities and pledge their loyalty to him, this approach only seemed to take true political effect when he entered the capital in order to reestablish union, peace, and tranquility: “Nous avons pour ceste consideration, apres les victoires, pardonné et donné la vie à ceux qui ont attenté contre la nostre.”

The simultaneous publication of his *Declaration du roy* (1594), in which he gave new assurances of his benevolence in dealing with the people of France and guaranteed Parisians that he would be clement and forgiving, also helped sway public opinion. He repeated his profession of faith, stating that he would “vivre et mourir en la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine” and declared that he wanted to foster the unity of his subjects so that they could “vivre en bonne amity et

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He also proposed a policy of amnesty and “oubliance.” All things that had happened in the past were to be forgotten: “[le roi] veut et entend que toutes choses passées et advenues depuis les troubles, soient oubliées.” Apart from “some one hundred and twenty of the League’s most notorious ringleaders,” this kindness was even to be extended to the Seize (the Leaguer group controlling the capital): “[il] défend à tous ses procureurs généraux leur substituz et autres officiers, en faire aucune recherche alencontre de quelques personnes que ce soit, mesmes de ceux que l’on appelloit vulgairement les Seize […].”

This use of clemency and forgiveness was relayed in many of the representations of the Surrender of Paris. In Nicolas Bollery’s engraving entitled the Réduction miraculeuse de Paris sous l’obéissance du Roy très-chrestien Henry IIII, the king is shown riding on horseback into the capital (see appendix 3). Apart from a few Spaniards being taken prisoner and others falling into the river, seemingly accidentally pushed to the side as his army enters (a sort of minimal, almost passive violence), the scene is peaceful. We see him greeted by his subjects as he is saluting them. In a similar

90 Declaration du roy [accordant amnistie au bourgeois de Paris du parti des Seize], 3-4.
91 Ibid. See also Declaration du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 18-19.
93 Declaration du roy [accordant amnistie au bourgeois de Paris du parti des Seize], 4-5. Deputies of Beauvais who spoke of Henri IV’s generosity, summarized Henri IV’s words: “[…] lorsque j’entray à Paris…je perdonnay a tous les Seize, et leur permis de demeurer, s’ils voulaient, ou de se retirer es lieu de mon obeissance…sous la fidelité qu’ils me jurent, et toute fois n’a esté tenu par un petit Boucher, predicateur, que l’argent espagnol poussoit.” (John Théodore Dupont-White, La Ligue à Beauvais, Paris: n.p., 1846, 270)
engraving, Bollery also depicts the king on his way to the Church of Notre-Dame to give thanks to God, hear Mass, and celebrate a *Te Deum*. As the written commentary accompanying the image explains, people had surrounded him in admiration and “sans frayeur approchoit de luy jusques à l’estrier avec plusieurs acclamations et signes d’allegresse meslez parmy le son des trompettes et clairons.” The king himself described his entry in similar terms: “[...] l’entrée d’une armee irritée a plustost ressemblé à la joyeuse entree qui s’est faitcy devant aux Roys noz predecesseurs à l’advenement à leur Corrone: la resjoissance, les applaudissemnes du peuple qui a veu son Roy si desiré [...]” Bollery’s engraving—published after 1601 (“[il y a] douze ans entiers que cela s’est passe”)—is a conscious relaying of the king’s own politics of douceur. Nothing is more salient in his representations and commentaries than the fact that there had been virtually no bloodshed during Henri IV’s orderly takeover of Paris. Again, divine providence was to be thanked. Such a miracle, he wrote, must have been


95 Nicolas Bollery, *Comme le Roy alla incontinent à l’Eglise de Nostre-Dame*, 1. When the king proclaimed his pardon, the populous reacted with exclamations of joy: “La publication de la volonté de sa Majesté fist que le peuple, qui premiérement estoit aucunement estonna, changea cest estonnement en joye et assurance, et vint en si grand affluence au lieu où estoit le roy, que l’église de Nostre Dame, ny le parvis, ny les rues qui y abbordent n’estoient assez grandes ny assez capables pour les contenir tous, ny la voix des chantres ne pouvoint estré entendue, tant le bruit estoit grand qui procedoit des frappemens des mains et des cri d’allegresse qu’ils faisoient. On n’oyoit partout retentir que Vive le roy, comme s’il fust venu dedans ceste eglise durant une paix asseurée. De laquelle eglise sa Majesté estant sortie et remontéee à cheval retournant en son chasteau du Louvre en mesme ordre qu’elle y estoit venue, les mesmes cri et chants de rejoissance furente ouys par toutes les rues où elle passoit, icelles rues et toutes les boutiques et fenestres estant remplies de personnes de tout sexe, de tout aage et de toutes qualitez. On ne voyoit que signes d’allegresse merveilleuse, on n’oyoit sinon acclamations de sincere et naïfve bienveuillence.” (Ibid.)

96 Edict et Declaration du Roy, sur la reduction de la ville de Paris, soubs son obeyssance, 10.

due to the intervention of God on the king’s behalf: “ceste heureuse et esmerveillable journée, en laquelle avez recouvert sans perte d’hommes et sans aucune resistance l’ancien throne de vos devanciers, Dieu vous ayant par sa toute puissant main conservé [...]”. Pierre de L’Estoile had made a similar remark in his Journal du règne de Henri IV:

Le mardi XXIIᵉ jour de mars 1594, à > huit < [md sept] heures du matin, le Roy entra dedans Paris par la mesme porte que le feu Roy en estoit sorti, et fut la ville reduitte en son obeissance, sans saq et sans effusion de sang, fors de quelques lansquenets qui voulurent mener les mains, et deux ou trois bourgeois de la ville. La vie desquels le Roy dit depuis avoit eu desir de racheter, s’il eust esté en sa puissance, de la somme de cinquante mil escus, pour laisser un singulier tesmoignage à la posterité que le Roy avoit pris Paris sans le meurtre d’un seul homme.

Priding himself on having spilled little blood, professing even to have wanted to buy back the few lives of those who had died had it been possible, the king had peacefully taken control over Paris. For L’Estoile as well, it was an “oeuvre de Dieu extraordinaire, voire des plus grandes,” that an “entreprise esvantée comme elle estoit, et sceu de tant de personnes, voire longtemps auparavant, ait peu reussir à sa fin.” As proof that the Surrender of Paris had been an event situated outside the purview of common experience, L’Estoile even described some of Henri IV’s enemies as having undergone a change of

98 Ibid.
99 Journal du règne de Henri IV, éd. Gilbert Schrenck, t. II, 313. Henri IV described his takeover of Paris in similar terms: “Et pour la grande compassion que nous avons eue de la Capitale ville de nostre Royaume, pour en éviter le sac, et espargner le sang de plusieurs bons Citoyens qui ne participoient aux malheureux desseins de ceux qui y fomentent la rebellion, Avons mieux aymé demeurer frustrez de l’obeyssance qui nou y est deue, que de voir les hommes innocens qui y habitent, les femmes et les petits enfans, et tant de beaux edifices exposez à la violence, à la rage et à la fureur du feu et des couteaux.” (Edict et Declaration du Roy, sur la reduction de la ville de Paris, soubs son obeyssance, 4-5.)
heart because of his clemency. Thus, a Leaguer priest at Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie, one of the few not pardoned by Henri IV, thanked God that “les choses s’estoient passées si doucement en la reduction de Paris.” He was astonished that “le Roy s’estoit montré merveilleusement doux et benign, en ce qu’il leur avoit à tous pardonné, combien que plusieurs d’entre eux eussent fait de mauvais actes et irremissibles.” This comment, in fact, strains credulity and suggests that one should use caution when reading enthusiastic accounts of the king’s politics of clemency. Although such a shift in the perception of the king on the part of this Leaguer priest was not in theory impossible, the fact that he now seemed to go as far as to admit that many of the acts committed by his party were irremissible appears at least suspect. As we well know, L’Estoile, a Royalist, would not have been the first memorialist to emphasize the mercifulness of Henri IV by ventriloquizing alleged repentant Leaguers. Equally suspect is another example he gives of a Spanish woman who, although she was being forced to leave Paris like all Spaniards (they were considered enemies to the crown and not subject to the king’s pardon), went to great lengths in praising the king:

Une femme d’un Hespagnol, passant avec les troupes pria qu’on lui monstrast le Roy, disant tout hault que la France estoit heureuse d’avoir un si grand Roy, si bon, si doux, et si clement, lequel leur avoit pardonné à tous, et que s’ils l’eussent tenu, comme il les tenoit, qu’ils n’eussent eu garde de lui en faire autant. Après

101 Interestingly, there is a kind of parallel between the Surrender of Paris and Henri IV’s abjuration ceremony. When the monarch describes the joy that his subjects showed after the completion of his conversion, he includes those of his enemies: “Nostredite Instruction apres suyvie de nostre repentance et Confession de foy : puis de l’absolution que nous en avons receuë, et par apres de nostre admission par eux en l’Eglise, à la veüe de tout le peuple, et avec une telle allegresse et aplaudissement que l’air retenti des loüanges et cantiques qui en furent envoyez au Ciel, non seulement par noz bons sujets, qui ne se sont point departiz de nostre obeissance : par ceux mesmes qui en ont esté desvoyez : specialement de nostre ville de Paris, qui y estoyent accouruz à grandes trouppes, pour estre spectateurs de ce S. mysteres [...].” (Declaracion du roy [portant amnistie], Lyon: Pierre Rochemond, 1594, 4)

qu’on lui eust montré le Roy. “Je le voy,” dist-elle, et le regardant, commença de lui crier tout haut: “Je prie à Dieu, bon Roy, que Dieu te doint toute properité, et de moi, estant en mon pays, et quelque part que je sois, je te benirai tousjours, et celebrerai ta grandeur, ta bonté et ta clemence.”

The fact is that Royalists like L’Estoile made it a point to include the voices of the king’s “enemies” in their writings. The examples of the priest and of the Spanish woman, which are only two of many, make it clear that the king’s supporters were invested in producing an image of him that would make it seem as if everyone, including his enemies, adhered and obeyed to the new power. The author of Le Ligueur repenti had resorted to the same devices when he had put into the mouth of a known Leaguer that the king would issue a general pardon to all repentant Ultra-Catholic Leaguers in order to bring about peace: “Or bien je veux trouver un remede pour tous, / Pour faire tost la paix l’on fera cas de vous, / Le Roy qui est tout bon oublera vostre offense […] Il vous pardonra tous, c’est le mieux que j’y voy, / C’est le mieux que j’y treuve, et pour vous et pour moy […]”.

There is no doubt that the politics of forgiveness that Catholic Royalists somewhat artificially promoted by speaking in the name of their enemies were crucial in facilitating the rise of Henri IV’s authority. What better way to convert the masses than to generate a discourse on his forgiveness as well as its reception! In this process, Henri IV came to embody a new phase in what we have termed the “politics of repentance.” Rather than adopting the image of a penitent taking on the guilt of the nation, as Henri III had

103 Ibid., 316.


105 [Claude de Trellon], Le Ligueur repenti, 17.
done, the Bourbon monarch fashioned himself after another, very different figure—that of the priest absolving sinners. It was he who now granted forgiveness, and the rebels were the sinners who should repent. Needless to say, such a shift in the burden of culpability also served to deflect attention away from the king’s recent conversion, which, as we have seen, had been used against him.
CHAPTER 5

REFRAMING PAST TRAUMAS:
A LEAGUER’S AMBIVALENT REPENTANCE

“Our own powers, Montaigne shows, change with our bodily and emotional conditions, so that what we judge true at one moment we see false or dubious at another.”

After the premature death of the duke of Anjou, Henri III’s brother, the Huguenot Henri de Navarre became heir presumptive to the throne. As we have already seen, many Leaguers were loath to submit to a “relapsed heretic.” In 1594, when the Bourbon monarch succeeded in his takeover of Paris, they refused to accept his offer of amnesty and to pledge their allegiance to him, preferring instead to go into exile and to preserve their “liberté de conscience.” If, over the years, some scholars have examined the cases of Leaguers and Protestants who, in the end, had come to recognize Henri IV as their king after his 1593 abjuration, what has often been overlooked in their discussions is what those changes in allegiances actually meant for those who experienced them. Some felt they had undergone a spiritual transformation and truly repented for the past. What did it mean, for instance, when a militant Leaguer who had openly written against the king for so many years, finally reached a state that appeared to be genuine repentance?

What did the narrative of such a radical change of heart look like, and how did it differ from the fictionalized ones we have seen in the previous chapter? Clearly, recounting one’s shift from rejection to acceptance of the king had tremendous political import at the turn of the sixteenth century.

Real confessions of repentance from Leaguers were published, as if the forged confessions by Royalists had been echoes of real ones, or writings they had sought to invite or elicit. It is well known that following the king’s conversion, coronation, and the Surrender of Paris, a wave of submissions had occurred—some evidently a product of political expediency and prudence, others ambiguous, and a few appearing genuine.² Jacques Commolet, a Jesuit, and Linestre, the priest of Saint-Gervais, both notorious Leaguers, accepted the king so quickly and in such a dramatic way that L’Estoile was convinced that their loyalty was feigned: “Commolet et Incestre de grands ligueurs qu’ils estoient devenus roiaux, ou pour le moins feinans de l’estre, recommanderent fort en leurs sermons la personne du Roy nostre Sire, principalement Incestre, qui s’estendit si avant sur les louanges de Sa Majesté qu’on pensoit qu’il n’en dus jamais sortir.”³ Whatever the truth behind these changes of political parties—after all, if not overt persecution, banishment remained a real possibility for unrepentant Leaguers—the two-pronged conceptual weapon of repentance/obedience shaped the new political landscape.

Of particular interest for the understanding of this phenomenon are Leaguers whose repentance seems genuine. One example is that of Pierre Matthieu, an ex-Leaguer who


had long been skeptical of the Bourbon monarch and whose *La Guisiade* was an attack against Henri III that went as far as justifying tyrannicide. Entirely reversing course, he ultimately decided to lend his support to Henri IV and became one of the deputies sent from Lyon in 1594 to pledge loyalty to the king. All evidence points to the fact that his acceptance of the new power was made in earnest: his writings after 1594 never fail in their praise of Henri IV, who ended up appointing him as one of his official historiographers at the court. At the beginning of his *Histoires des derniers troubles de France, sous les règnes des rois...Henri III et Henri IIII*, he provided a striking illustration of the penitent-Leaguer/forgiving-monarch ideological scheme, extoling Henri IV’s clemency toward those of his seditious subjects who had repented:

[...] on la void [la clemence] neantmoins tant parfaite et accomplie en vous que la France ne nourrit jamais Prince plus doux, plus Clement, plus pardonnant et plus oublieux de l’injure quand il s’en peut venger, que vous estes. Vertu qui releve les abbatus, qui fait bon visage à ceux qui se prosternent aux pied de votre Majesté, qui embrasse ceux qui se presentent à elle, le service à la bouche, le repentir au cœur, estans encore hors d’haleine pour avoir fait courir à bride abattue la discorde et la rebellion parmy voz subjets.4

Thus, while Royalists were attempting to make use of fictionalized depictions of repentant Leaguers to advance their political agenda, some Leaguers in fact adopted their rhetoric and seemed to truly repent for their past actions. It was also the case of Louis Dorléans who, as we saw in chapter three, had been a staunch opponent of Henri IV and had believed his conversion to be nothing other than a Machiavellian ruse. In 1584, after François, the Duke of Anjou, had died of tuberculosis, suddenly placing Henri de Navarre

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4 Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire des derniers troubles de France soubs les règnes des rois... Henry III... Henry IIII...*, contenant tout ce qui s'est passé durant les derniers troubles, jusqués à la paix faicte entre les rois de France et d'Espagne, avec un recueil des édicts et articles accordez par le roy Henry IIII pour la réunion de ses sujects. Dernière édition, revue et augmentée de l'histoire des guerres entre les maisons de France, d'Espagne et de Savoye, n.p.: n.p. 1606.
as successor to the crown, the Leaguer had demonized the Bourbon ruler. In his *Apologie ou Defense des catholiques unis les uns avec les autres, contre les impostures des catholiques associez à ceux de la pretendüe Religion* (1586), he had written that the Holy League had the responsibility to defend the realm against such a “heretic,” for such a “roy infidèle” would inevitably lead “son peuple à l’infidélité.”

The same year, he had published *Advertisement, des Catholiques anglois aux François Catholiques, du danger où ils sont de perdre leur Religion... s’ils reçoivent à la Couronne un roy qui soit Heretique*, and asserted that putting Henri de Navarre on the throne would be like letting in “le vautour sur les poussins, le loup sur les brebis et le renard sur les poules.” It was better, he claimed, to resolve oneself to dying than to accept Henri de Navarre as king: “Aussi vous faut-il resouldre de plustost mourir, que de recevoir le Roy de Navarre à la Couronne.” He reiterated his hateful attacks in *Le Banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete*, a pamphlet which, as we already know, sought to denounce the hypocrisy of his conversion (see chapter three). Such religious intransigence and manifest disobedience towards the monarch had resulted in Dorléans’s being sent into exile for nine years. The fact that Pierre de L’Estoile mentions in his journal that his works had been burned in the

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7 Ibid., 50.
public square in Paris along with those of the notorious theologian Jean Boucher, is proof enough that we are dealing here with one of the most militant Leaguers.\(^8\)

It may then come as a surprise to us to discover that Dorléans came to represent a paragon of the repentant Leaguer. In a number of texts repudiating his past opinions, he spoke openly about his faults, expressing shame and remorse for having written against the king. To get a sense of the extraordinary nature of this reversal, one only has to turn to the unpublished letter he wrote to the monarch, in which he asked for pardon. The document we have was written sometime before his return from exile, between the years 1600-1602, and is most likely a copy of the original letter sent to the monarch. In open acknowledgement of his past faults, repentant and submissive, the Leaguer portrayed himself as having moved beyond excuses that could still be taken as justifications: “Je ne m’excuse point de mes fautes passees, car je les reconois [...].”\(^9\) When Henri IV eventually pardoned him, in all likelihood in 1602, he published a two-hundred-page work entitled *Remerciement au Roy* (1604) in which he expressed his gratitude. In fact, his politics had changed to such a degree that in the aftermath of the king’s assassination, in 1610, at the hand of Ravaillac, he went as far as to compose a five-hundred-page eulogy in his honor, entitled *La Plante Humaine, sur le trépas du roy Henry le grand*, in which he praised him as one of the greatest rulers since Caesar and Augustus.

Trying to better understand how such a shift could have occurred is of importance if we are to delve deeper into the history of the concept of repentance and of its political-

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9 B.N.F. ms fr 4922, f° 188, *Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris*. 

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theological uses. To grasp the various ways in which Henri IV’s power solidified through discourses on repentance (whether they were satirical, fictionalized, or “authentic”), it is crucial to analyze how some Leaguers would have indeed internalized such discourses, altogether adopting the rhetoric disseminated by Royalists, or adapting it to fit their own politics and religion. Dorléans makes a good case study for such an approach because of the important position he held in the Holy League (he was one of their avocat) and because of his genuine and long-standing attachment to their cause. The fact that the process of his repentance was in no way straightforward helps build a more realistic portrait of the penitent Leaguer than those we have so far encountered. It is hence essential to analyze the nuances and intricacies of Dorléans’s personal transformation if we are to get a better sense of just how a new rhetoric on penance was beginning to take shape at the end of the 1590s and the beginning of the 1600s.

A Wavering Exile: Dorléans on the Brink of Repentance

As he settled into his banishment to the pays Brabant, which was a direct consequence of the conversion of Henri IV and of the Surrender of Paris in 1594, Dorléans appeared very much the adamant Leaguer, impenitent as can be. In his Prière de l’auteur pendant la maladie qu’il eut en Flandres, an unpublished work written during this period, he called upon God to destroy Henri IV’s supporters in France, particularly the duplicitous ecclesiastics who had allied themselves with the monarch:

XIII
Seigneur, ce n’est pas moi, ce sont les cœurs rebelles,
Qui se doivent briser des coups de votre main;
Foudroiez, poudroiez les ames infidelles ;
Mai a vos serviteurs soiez doux et humain.

XIV

Un tas de Predicans fourmillent en la France,
Qui ont de votre foi tant de peuples seduits ;
Versez dessus leur chef vos torrents de vengeance,
Et perdez les mechants, qui les ont introduits.

XV

Reversez d’un grand coup la trai tre hypocrisie,
Jettez son masque bas, et la mettez a nud ;
Montrez que pour neant la trompeuse heresie
Fait qu’un N. mechant pour juste soit tenu.¹⁰

In this impassioned plea, Dorléans castigated those who had joined the ranks of Henri IV’s followers and betrayed Catholicism. Unlike him, all of France has been fooled into thinking that Henri IV’s conversion had been sincere, failing to recognize it as a ruse meant to destroy Catholicism. For the exiled Dorléans, Henri de Navarre’s “capture” of Paris in 1594 had been the death of religion: “ce coup a frappé la religion à la mort.”¹¹

He had left France in the belief that there could no longer be any place for him in a nation without true Catholic faith. Religion in France had been corrupted by the actions of Henri III and Henri IV: “[…] la derniere France [a été] corrompue souz le dernier des Valois, impie et libertine souz le premier des Bourbons, et du tout changee et alteree de son premier et religieus naturel.”¹² There were other factors that led to his exile, one of which was his understandable fear of the retributions that could possibly befall him in the new political climate: “Je vous confesseray toutesfois que je prins resolution de m’en

¹⁰ B.N.F. ms fr 863, f° 169, Poësies de Louïs Dorléans.

¹¹ B.N.F. ms fr 4922, f° 3, Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris.

¹² Ibid., f° 1.
aller: non crainte de ma conscience, mais crainte de quelque violence.”13 However, long after the facts, having been reconciled with the king, Dorléans would explain his exile as the result of a personal choice rather than one born out of necessity: “Je vous confesseray que mon exil a esté volontaire et non forcé, car je m’en suis allé de franche volonté et non par contrainte.”14 In both cases, it was a matter of making exile not a punishment, but the result of his unwavering commitment to his religious faith and conscience. Notable Leaguers such as Jean Boucher or Montgaillard had resorted to the same justifications. Their willingness to go into exile was a way to testify to the strength of their religion. As the important work of Robert Descimon and José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez has shown, Henri IV’s victory was so catastrophic to the most zealous and unyielding of Leaguers that they preferred exile rather than compromise.15

As we well know, in the beginning years of Henri IV’s reign, when the possibility of a deposition still lingered in the minds of those who still refused to concede defeat, Spain had become an important political and religious model. From his exile, Dorléans himself shared in the French Leaguers’ growing “hispanophilie religieuse.”16 In a letter entitled C.V. Domino Lopez regalium magistro et Caet., he prayed for Phillip II, whom, along with many other Ultra-Catholics, he had hoped would succeed in placing his

13 Ibid.


daughter, Isabelle-Claire-Eugenie d’Autriche, on the throne of France during the 1593 États généraux. Dorléans even wrote a letter directly to Isabelle-Claire-Eugenie d’Autriche, expressing his gratitude for the financial help he had received from her father during his exile:

O que Dieu fasse paix [paix] au bon Roi votre pere, 
et qu’a vous et aux siens sa faveur soit prospere; 
Je n’oublierai jamais que son coeur tant humain 
Lors me dona des friust de sa roiale main, 
Et que pour soulager ma fortune imploiable, 
Il me fut come un Dieu, come un pere amiable, 
Et sans l’importuner, sa liberalité 
Me tira du gozier de la necessité.  

To Dorléans, the Spanish monarch alone appeared capable of maintaining Catholicism authentic and free from the “corruptions” of Protestantism. His support of Phillip II would have appeared to Royalists overtly seditious, an act of treason—after all, Henri IV was now at war with Spain. The reason Dorléans was willing to betray his national loyalties was that the outcome of the war with Spain offered him the promise of an alternative future for France. Should Spain succeed in vanquishing Henri IV’s army, Catholicism, he believed, would be reinstated in France in its purest form.

When it is approached with the knowledge of his later turnabout, the way in which Dorléans cast himself again and again as unrepentant, steadfast, and unwavering in

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17 Isabelle-Claire-Eugenie d’Autriche was the granddaughter of Henri II. In an attempt to delegitimize Henri de Navarre right to the throne, Leaguers and Phillip II strongly supported her candidacy during the États-Généraux of 1593 as a pretender to the throne.

18 B.N.F. ms fr 863, f° 735, Poësies de Louïs Dorléans.


20 The Franco-Spanish War (1595-1598) had begun shortly after the Bourbon monarch succeeded the throne.
his faith becomes fascinating. In *De Suo Exilio*, an undated text in which he considers his own experience of exile through the lens of Ovid, Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, Dorléans explores what had been his state of mind at that time. He describes himself as having felt as if he were one of the last Christians left to continue to demonstrate moral integrity and constancy in the face of political failure:

> Cessit libidini Caesaris Reipublicae causa, licet optima, et a bonis secuta.
> Il a marqué la lacheté des peuples, qui ont abandonné le bien public, pour leur interest particulier, en favorisant les grands.\(^{21}\)

If many French people had forsaken the interests of the greater good for their own personal interest, Dorléans, on the contrary, had upheld his faith in spite of the obvious political risks. He had seen himself as a kind of religious and political martyr, almost alone among contemporary Catholics to fearlessly refuse to submit to the enemies of religion. In his notes reflecting on his exile, he even went as far as to compare himself to the famous orator, Cato the Younger, known for his moral integrity and immunity to corruption during the late Roman Republic. Quoting a passage from book II of Horace’s *Odes*, Dorléans wrote: “Cuncta terrarum subacta, Praeter atrocem animum Catonis” (“All the world is subjugated, apart from the stern spirit of Cato”). Just as Cato, he too had been “si ferme en la defense de sa Religion, que quand elle auroit esté abandonnee de tous, il l’auroit maintenu tousjours de tous son pouvoir.”\(^{22}\) Commenting a passage from book I of Lucan’s *Civil War*, he also writes that he had believed that his “jugement n’estoit pas si ravalé, que d’estre esclave du sentiment des Grands (qui sont apelez

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\(^{21}\) B.N.F. ms fr 4922, f° 179r, *Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris.*

\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*
Dieux) quand ils n’estoient pas pour la verité, quelque bonheur qui les acompagnait.”

Although the most powerful men in society had embrassed the victor, Dorléans, like the defeated heros of old, had refused to go along with the errors of those favored by blind fortune. The Gods had been for the victors, but Cato for the vanquished: “Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.” The only thing left was the satisfaction of dying for the cause of truth: “[...] il auroit du moins cet avantage, de mourir courageusement et avec honneur.”

The true reward would be in the eternal afterlife: “[...] il ne rabatroit rien de son courage, sachant bien la recompense qu’il en devoit attendre au dernier de Dieu juste et misericordieux.”

In this short text made of classical quotations and brief developments illustrating Dorléans’s state of mind as an exile, steadfastness to the cause appears as the greatest virtue. Quoting Sextus Propertius, he saw it as making or breaking a soldier’s strength: “Frangit et attollit vires milite causa.”

His courage in the defense of Catholicism against powerful enemies was proof enough that his cause was honorable:

“Il [Dorléans] raporte, a la bonté de sa cause, sa voie est la defense de la veritable Religion, qui est la seule cat[h]olique, le courage qu’il avoit a la defendre, contre tant et

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23 Ibid., f° 179v.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., f° 181v.

26 Ibid., f° 181v.

27 Ibid., f° 179r. Dorléans is citing book IV (6, 45-52) of Sextus Propertius’s Elegiae. In Prière de l’Auteur pendant la maladie qu’il eut en Flandres, he also describes himself as a fallen soldier: “Je fini comme un soldat, qu’un brave chef de guerre / Un cavalier puissant sur le sol a jeté: / On le vois froid et blanc, depouillé sur la terre, / Et son corps en cent lieux de glaive traversé.” (B.N.F. ms fr 863, f° 170, Poësies de Louis Dorléans.)
He had acted for the right reasons. God would one day rescue him from his misery and oppression: “Il a cru que ses actions estant sincères et justes, Dieu ne le laisserait pas toujours dans l’oppression et la misère.” And in the end, no one could truly reproach him for having committed a crime: “Du moins il avait cette consolation, que dans sa plus grande calamité on ne lui pouvait reprocher aucun crime; et il avait le témoignage de sa conscience et des gens de bien, d’avoir bien servi son pays et sa religion, qui estoit la cause de son exil.”

A striking ambivalence permeates De Suo Exilio. On the one hand, although it is in fact difficult to assign a precise date to the manuscript, it is clear that Dorléans is writing about an earlier self. His use of the third person singular, which marks a desire for critical distance, and the fact that he expresses the political and religious beliefs he held at the time through commentaries of Latin quotes, are telling. So is the fact that he suggests that time has passed, and that what had once seemed true, no longer does. This last aspect is particularly perceptible in the lines where he acknowledges that he had been mistaken in believing that Henri IV had in fact wanted to destroy the Catholic faith: “Il [Dorléans] entend qu’en se retirant de la France, la Religion s’en estoit aussi banie: par ce qu’il croioit, que la conversion du Roi Henri quatrième à la religion catholique estoit feinte et par maxime d’estat: et que quand son autorité seroit puissamment etablie, il detruiroit la

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28 Ibid., f° 179r.

29 Ibid., f° 181r.

30 Ibid., f° 181r & 181v. The trials of exile had not tainted Dorléans’s conscience: “[…] sa vertu n’a point recue de diminution dans son adversité ; et que les gens de bien qu’il a rencontré dans le lieu de son exil, ont fait estat de lui, et l’ont favorisé de leur amitié.” (f° 181r.)
Religion Catholique ; en quoi il s’abusoit grandement, comme le succes l’a fait voir.” It seems thus possible to say that Dorléans was already on his way to changing his opinion of Henri IV at the time he was writing De Suo Exilio. Yet, one cannot help but notice that restating his old beliefs could also act as a way of justifying them, perhaps by suggesting that the circumstances had been such that he couldn’t have acted and thought otherwise than he had done.

An example of this ambivalence appears in his use of Ovid to tell of the hardships of exile. Negative affects had seized the Roman, who had described himself as being overcome by anger at the absurdity of writing far from all, in a foreign land. Dorléans recognized in this experience his own decline and humiliation. He too was losing his taste for the things that had previously sustained him, namely books and writing:

\[
\begin{align*}
Dum \ vix \ mutata \ qui \ sim \ fuerimque \ recordor, \\
Et \ tulerit \ me \ quo \ casus \ et \ unde \ subit:\ \\
Saepe \ manus \ demens, \ studiis \ irata \ sibique, \\
Misit \ in \ arsuros \ haec \ monumenta \ rogos.
\end{align*}
\]

Son infortune le rendoit si deplaisant à soi-meme, Qu’il [Dorléans] ne prenoit pas mesme gout à la lecture et à la composition, qui avoient esté autrefois ses plus cheries delices. 32 If Dorléans had once shown great enthusiasm for letters, his confidence was now wavering. Confusion was taking hold. His days of glory were behind him, and all he

\[31\text{ B.N.F. ms fr 4922, f° 178-9, Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris.}\]

\[32\text{“Again when I bethink me what, through change of fortune, I am and what I was, when it comes over me whither fate has borne me and whence, often my mad hand, in anger with my efforts and with itself, has hurled these monuments on the burning funeral pyres.” Apart from the last line, which differs perhaps because Dorléans was citing from memory, and which should read “misit in arsuros carmina nostra focos” [“had hurled my verses to blaze upon the hearth”], this translation is that of Arthur Leslie Wheeler in Ovid’s Tristia; Ex Ponto (2nd ed., rev. by G.P. Goold., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988, 164-165: 99-102).}\]
could do was retain the memory of what had been. Here as well, Ovid had things to teach:

_Nos quoque floruimus, sed flos erat ille caducus,
fammeaque de stipula nostra brevisque fuit._

La longueur de son exil, jointe aux incomoditez qu’il [Dorléans] lui a causé, en grand nombre et trefacheuses, lui a fait trouver bien court le temps de sa prosperité, qu’il compare à la fleur, facile à flétrir, mais qui rend bonne odeur, et a la lumiere, facile à s’éteindre, mais qui a de l’eclat.  

Regardless of how much “éclat” Dorléans’s life once had, bitter disappointment and obscurity dominated the present. Great plans and hopes had been thwarted. Looking at himself, he no longer saw the righteous fighter for the cause of the League that he had been, but a defeated man. His passion for the cause seemed to be wavering. This is all the more perceptible if we consider what surrounds the passage Dorléans borrowed from Ovid: a chapter of the _Tristia_ which takes the form of a letter addressed to a detractor whom the Roman poet criticized for having mocked his misfortunes. On the one hand, if we read it in light of Dorléans’s situation, this passage seems to be yet again another iteration of his rancor towards his enemies: he too felt the need to continue writing against them in order to justify and reaffirm his religious and political convictions. On the other hand, Dorléans takes this quote from a letter that also contains the suggestion that repentance and pardon were a possibility. In it, Ovid indeed openly acknowledged there had been a reason for his banishment—even if it was to deem it a fault and not a crime—

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33 B.N.F. ms fr 4922, 177v-178r, _Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris_. This is the translation of the Ovid quote: “I too had my day, but that day was fleeting, / my fire was but of straw and short-lived.” ( _Tristia; Ex Ponto_ , English transl. by Arthur Leslie Wheeler. 2nd ed., rev. by G.P. Goold., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988, 241.)
and hoped for the pardon of the emperor, who would then perhaps side with him and
punish his detractor:

Neve tamen tota capias fera gaudia mente,
non est placandi spes mihi nulla dei,
vel quia peccavi citra scelus, utque pudore
non caret, invidia sic mea culpa caret,
vel qui nil ingens ad finem solis ab ortu
illo, cui paret, mitius orbis habet.
Scilicet ut non est per vim superabilis ulii,
Molle cor ad timidas sic habet ille preces,
Exemploque deum, quibus accessurus et ipse est,
Cum poenae venia plura roganda dabit. […]
ergo ne nimium nostra laetere ruina,
restitui quondam me quoque posse puta :
posse puta fieri lenito principe vultus
ut vides media tristis in urbe meos,
utque ego te videam causa graviore fugatum,
haec sunt a primis proxima vota meis. 34

When Augustus had banished Ovid, it had not been for breaking the law, but for a
mistake he had made—of which we know little—as well as for the publication of his Ars
amatoria. The injury to the emperor, as Arthur Leslie Wheeler noted, “was not a crime
(scelus), not illegal, but rather a fault (culpa, vitium) which he admitted to be wrong
(peccatum, delictum, noxa). He had not been guilty wittingly, but through chance
(fortuna, casus). There had been no criminal action (facinus) on his part, but he had

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34 Ovid, *Tristia: Ex Ponto*, English transl. by Arthur Leslie Wheeler. 2nd ed., rev. by G.P. Goold. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP), 1988, 241-243. The English translation of Ovid is: “Nevertheles that you [the detractor] may not fill all your soul with cruel joy, not wholly gone is my hope of appeasing the god, because my mistake fell short of crime, and though my fault is not free from shame, yet 'tis free from odium, or because the wide world from the rising sun to its setting holds nothing more merciful than him whom it obeys. Indeed though no force can overcome him, yet he has a tender heart for the petitions of the timid, and after the example of the gods whom he himself is destined to join, with the remission of my penalty he will grant me further boons. […] So then that you rejoice not overmuch in my ruin, consider that even I may some day be restored; consider that, if the prince is appeased, it may come to pass that you may be dismayed to see my face in the midst of the city, and I may see you exiled for a weightier cause. This, after that first wish, is the second prayer that I put forth.” *(Ibid.)*
laboured under a misunderstanding, he had blundered (error).” Ovid’s letter, when taken in its entirety, opens up the possibility of understanding Dorléans’s text as hesitating on the threshold of rethinking his exile. Dorléans may very well have been mulling over his past actions, perhaps attempting to come to terms with his own guilt and wondering whether or not the role he had played in the Holy League Wars had been as entirely innocent as he had once believed it to be. But more significantly, it seemed to suggest that he too was hoping for a better future and was starting to wait for the day he might be allowed to return to France and Paris. Although the exiled Dorléans had not yet changed his mind about the king nor started to truly question his support of the Holy League, we see from the context of the lines he quoted from Ovid, that he may have been contemplating whether or not he should try and appease Henri IV’s anger and ask him for pardon. At any rate, there can be no doubt that the hardships of exile were beginning to take their toll and that his views were no longer as unshakeable as they had first appeared to be. This we can also infer from a letter addressed to Father Lopez, of which only a manuscript copy remains in his archives:

\[
\text{Habet sane exilium magnas et graves aerumnas, et ubi nemo subvenit, gravissimas et intolerabiles: in eo enim genere calamitatis mones fere calamitates continentur.}
\]

As he reminds himself in De Suo Exilio, Dorléans, while still in Paris, had been esteemed for his writings, his uncommon eloquence, and his religious zeal: “Auparavant son exil il

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35 Ibid., xxi.

36 B.N.F. ms fr 4922, f° 193, Oeuvres posthumes de Monseigneur D’Orleans Avocat general du Parlement de Paris. “To be sure, the hardships of exile are great and grievous, and are most grievous and intolerable in the absence of assistance: for you warn us that in that kind of calamity all adversities are contained.” (My translation)
Dorléans s’estoit acquis beaucoup de renomee, tant par son eloquence, qui n’estoit pas commune, que par son Zele pour la Religion, qui estoit tres ardent et tres louable.” But after 1593, his world had started to crumble, as attested by the somber poems written in his exile in the north:

XXIV
Il [Dieu] m’a depouillé nud, je n’ai rien qui me reste,
Mes parens, mes amis m’ont tous abandonné
Ceux qui plus me cherchoient, m’evitent comme peste,
Ceux qui plus me fuioient, m’ont tous environé.

XXV
Son vent m’a fait surgir en province estrangere,
Ou rien je n’aperçois, que de l’affliction ;
L’espérance du bien m’est chose mensengere,
L’assurance du mal n’a point de fiction.

XXVI
Et de tout et de tous delaissé je lamente,
Je sui nud, froid, et sec au milieu d’un desert.
Seigneur, assistez moy, mon ame se contente,
En vous tout mon defaut se verra recouvert.  

As Dorléans’s resolve was wavering in the face of solitude and poverty, he also started to believe that his exile had a cause other than his fidelity to the League: “[...] Dieu ce grand guerrier me trouvant d’aventure, / Sur le poinct qu’il estoit contre nous irrité, / M’a d’un grand coup de main porte sur la verdure, / et du haut de l’honneur en bas precipité.”

No longer explained as a mere accident of fate, his reversal of fortune now appeared rather as the result of divine wrath. This too shows that Dorléans was not as certain about

37 Ibid., f° 177v.


39 B.N.F. ms fr 863, f° 171, Poësies de Louis Dorléans.
his past and his cause as he had once been. In fact, *De Suo Exilio* and the poems written in exile can be seen as containing the suggestion of an entirely new narrative, one which would reframe his relationship to the king and his involvement with the Holy League, and ultimately open up the possibility of repentance.

*Repenting with the King: Dorléans’s Double-Edged Encomium of Henri IV*

By 1603, after Henri IV had *de facto* pardoned him, Dorléans could no longer be viewed as the impenitent Leaguer he had been—he was now openly declaring his undying admiration for the monarch. In the *Remerciement au roy*, an encomium he published a year after his pardon, he not only extoled Henri IV’s virtues and stated his new loyalty to his government, but also, as we will see, gave a public confession of his own guilt. It is important to note that this work did not appear to stem from an obligation of gratitude, as payment in return for the pardon Dorléans had received: everything suggests that the old Leaguer had written it on his own initiative. No longer described as one of Satan’s henchman, Henri IV was now the ideal French monarch. Dorléans compared him to the most powerful leaders from antiquity, such as Alexander the Great, Augustus, and Hercules: “*Sire, vous estes l’Hercule des François* […].”40 Lest his readers doubt the sincerity of his sudden turnabout, Dorléans also made it a point to underscore the fact that his text had been written “non par adulation, dont je suis net, non par crainte, dont ma vie innocente me delivre, mais par une verité dont le Ciel et la Terre, et

dont les hommes et les Anges sont tesmoings affides et irreprochables.”

His words, he claimed, were “le sel d’une pure affection,” rather than “l’huile d’une molle adulation.”

This was not a devious attempt to harm the king: “Ma plume ne sera jamais le poignard de Joab qui tua Abner par derriere. Ma langue est trop Françoise, mon cœur trop Chrestien […].”

If we accept Dorléans’s claim to sincerity, how are we to understand this radical shift, from intransigent Leaguer to quasi Royalist? What does it tell us about penance?

In order to get a better sense of Dorléans’s transformation, it is important to first bring focus to the exact manner in which he praised the king. What was it about his old ennemy that had finally made him embrace him? The most recurrent image in Remerciement au roy is that of émerveillement. It is as if Dorléans stood awestruck before the divine glory of the monarch finally revealed to him:

[…] jettant l’œil sur vostre Royalle Majesté quand je vous contemple en vostre throsne comme Roy de France, c’est à dire le Roy des Rois, l’Agamenon de nostre Grece, l’Auguste de nostre Rome, que je vous voy autant aymé que redouté de vos sujets, je demeure comme esperdu, et m’est advis que je songe. Car certainement je ne voy que merveilles je ne voy qu’esbahissemens, je ne sens que ravissemens. Je vous confessery qu’il m’est advenu et advient bien souvent, de considere vostre felicité.

“[J]e demeure comme eperdu,” “[il] m’est advis que je songe,” “je ne voy que merveilles, je ne voy qu’esbahissemens, je ne sens que ravissemens”: these are clear signs that Dorléans’s conversion is here based on affect, on something felt rather than

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41 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 10.

42 Ibid.

43 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 14 (My emphasis).
understood. The king’s power over his subjects, his capacity to both be loved and feared, are almost miraculous and cannot be explained as the result of anything other than divine election:

Dieu toutefois, qui vous [Henri IV] regarde autrement que les autres [princes] (car le Soleil voit d’un autre œil Jupiter que Saturne) et qui vous a mis à part pour vous faire un miracle de la Nature, vous en a donné de particulieres, qui sont de tres-haute et tres-auguste marque, et dont vous luy este d’autant estroitement obligé, qu’il vous en a noblement et glorieusement apennagé.  

In the eyes of Dorléans, the king, then, was no longer a tyrant, or even an ordinary ruler: he had been especially chosen by God’s providence. Just as the term miraculum suggests, which derives from mirari, meaning “to be amazed or marveled at,” Henri IV had been elected to make men contemplate God’s extraordinary power in awe and wonder. His conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism was the most astonishing proof of His miraculous intervention. According to Dorléans, one had just to stop and consider the way in which Henri IV had ascended to “ce souverain Theatre d’honneur qui est la Royauté,” as well as the advantages that he had received from God, “qui ne sont communs aux autres Princes,” to marvel even more at this miracle (“il s’esmerveillera encore plus”). It was not just Dorléans who was struck with awe, but all the Princes of Europe: “C’est, SIRE, l’estat de vos diverses actions, qui sont rendues esmerveillables, non à moy seul, ni à vos sujets seulement, mais à tous vos voisins, et aux plus éloignés des Princes de l’Europe.”

44 Ibid., 13-14. My emphasis.


46 Ibid., 15.
Je vous diray librement, SIRE, et sous la bonne grace de vostre Majesté, que si j’eusse pensé, (mais qui l’eust pensé en la prosperité où vous estiez ?) que vous deussiez rechercher le sainct Pere, qui est le Pere commun de tous les Chrestiens, et ployer un peu ce chef de si haut ellevé sur le genre humain, pour entrer comme fit Clovis, vostre predecesseur en sa bergerie : jamais je n’eusse abandonné le pays, jamais je n’eusse esloigné vostre Majesté, pour m’absenter hors du Royaume. Mais vous estes montré en cet endroit, plus esmerveillable que la merveille mesme. D’autant que nul ne se persuadoit ce qu’il a veu depuis, nul ne pensoit ce que depuis vous avez prudemment executé.47

Henri IV, in the end, had genuinely sought out the pope and submitted to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Had he known that the conversion would be sincere, Dorléans claimed, he would never have left his country or his Majesty—but who could have believed such a thing possible? In a way, Dorléans could only explain his transformation from Leaguer to Royalist as the result of the king’s miraculous conversion.

Although it is at the heart of his admiratio, what Dorléans revered in the king was not merely God’s power, he was also immensely grateful for the personal clemency he had received from him, which had made his return possible. In this way, his Remerciement au roy can also be understood as a gift to the nation (“un présent à la France”) meant to honor his person:

[…] je supplieray vostre Majesté (Sire), de me donner congé de choisir en ce jardin [de la Royauté] quelques boutons de roses espanies à vostre honneur, voire quelques fruicts que je vois pendans aux branches de vostre vertu, afin d’en faire un present à la France qui les ayme et les revere. Permettez-moy s’il vous plaist, d’en façonner un bouquet que je luy jette dans le sein, et qu’elle porte par plaisir en faveur de vostre heureuse souvenance. […] C’est un présent que je luy veux faire de ma main, c’est un don, dont je la veux gratifier à mon retour […]48

47 Ibid., 67. My emphasis.

48 Ibid., 10.
This gift was also a way to make amends and let it be known to all that his violent accusations against the king had been foolish. Henri IV’s unexpected kindness and benevolence compounded his regret at having doubted for so long the legitimacy of his rule. He was especially impressed by the fact that Henri IV had remained moderate and merciful when he could just as easily have been corrupted by the pleasures of his victories:

Au milieu, toutefois, de tant de plaisirs, dont le moindre eust enyvré un esprit fort et bien timbré, vous estiez sobre et debonnaire, remis et non insolent, et donniez passeport à qui vous pouviez oster la vie, vous donnez asseurance à qui se defioit du temps, vous donnez assistance à qui vous delaissoit. Je jugé lors ce que vous feriez, establi, quant à vos commencements, assisté de tant de puissance, et les troubles si fraichement esteints, vous distillez tant de douceur. Encore n’estoit ce assez de me congedier si gratieusement, si à mon retour vous ne m’eusiez receu fort humainement, et selon vostre naturel, toujours benin et debonnaire.49

Although the king could have punished Dorléans, or refused to grant him an audience, he had assured him of his good will, helped him return to France and pardoned him in a good-natured and unostentatious way. Two of the king’s qualities thus particularly elicited Dorléans’s admiration, which both came directly from God—his “puissance” and his “douceur.” However, it was the second one that perhaps moved him most to write his encomiastic portrait as well as his own confession.50 If, as his enemy, he had witnessed the reach of his power, Dorléans had in the end benefited from his uncommon benevolence. He could talk about both qualities not in the abstract, but with the certainty of immediate experience:

49 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 66-67.

Je n’en parle point comme apprentif, j’en parle par science, et par experience. Et si je l’ay aprisée, non sans peril, je la loueray hors du peril, et tant que j’auray en moi un point de vie. Car c’est entre ces deux Deesses que vous [Henri IV] estes assis. C’est entre ceste Puissance et Debonnaireté, qu’est posé le throsne de vostre Majesté Royalle.\footnote{Ibid., 51-52.}

What Dorléans believed he had come to learn about the king was that his “débonnaireté” was not a façade, a mere strategy to win hearts. Two personal experiences served as evidence. The first one, of course, was the pardon he had been granted. Without reproof or punishment, Dorléans had been allowed to return to France after his exile and to once again become a subject of the king: “[…] le premier est de m’avoir revoqué en mon pays, et rendu au nombre de vos sujets.”\footnote{Ibid., 65.} The second concerned the unexpected effort that Henri IV had made to free him when, as a result of unforeseeable circumstances, he had been imprisoned upon his return home: “Le second [est] de m’avoir restitué en ma liberté et retiré d’une longue et ennuyeuse prison.”\footnote{Ibid.} Also astonishing to Dorléans was the fact that years before, despite his rebellion, the king had without hesitation granted him a “passport” so that he could leave France: “Je ne passeray sous silence un traict remarquable de vostre bonté, et qui est digne de vostre Majesté Royalle. C’est que vous me donnastes un passeport pour m’en aller, puis que j’estois resolu de ne point demeurer.”\footnote{Ibid., 66.} Like a worried father who yields to his ungrateful son’s wishes, the king had wanted to succor him even if it meant to facilitate his departure:

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}
Or en ce passeport, SIRE, je me représente en vous la bonté et débonnaireté d’un bon père, qui ne pouvant retenir son fils en la maison, bien qu’il s’en aille contre son vouloir, si est-ce qu’il lui baille argent à son départ, le charge de lettres de change, pour en trouver estant failly, rescript à ses amis de luy assister, et luy monstre ce qu’il doit suivre, et ce qu’il doit éviter par les chemins. Ce fut lors que je vis paraistre un rayon de ce grand Soleil, que j’ay depuis veu reluire en son plein Midy, et qui a esperdu mes yeux de sa lumiere.\(^{55}\)

Now struck by the care and generosity that Henri IV had then already shown him, Dorléans cast himself as the prodigal son from the famous parable of Luke 15:2—also a tale of rebellion, exile, forgiveness, and repentance. He too had run off to a distant land, only to return dumbfounded and speechless when, rather than punishing him, Henri IV had offered him mercy and unconditional acceptance. In the biblical story, the father rejoices at his son’s return and embraces him in true forgiveness, a gesture of paternal love that deeply moves him to repent and recognize his fault: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Like the parable of the lost sheep that precedes it, it is a story about how a son finds his way back home—both literally (he returns from a long journey) and spiritually (after straying, he rejoins the path of righteousness). The parallel with Dorléans’s situation was striking: Henri IV’s clemency and forgiveness had moved him to understand his past faults and acknowledge his guilt, before setting him on the path to repentance and righteousness.

Dorléans’s réflexions on his return to France showed that he was still struggling to find his way. In fact, his émerveillement can itself be understood as a sign that there remained in spite of all a lingering ambiguity in the way he understood his relation with the king. Henri IV, he wrote, had “esperdu mes yeux de sa lumiere”\(^ {56}\): his light struck his

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 66.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
eyes with dazzling force. This particular metaphor can be read in two different ways. If Dorléans obviously used it to signify his admiration and wonder before the king, it also contained an element of puzzlement and confusion. It is as if he still felt in part disoriented and lost, unable to fully see through the king’s “blinding light.” Plato’s Socrates made of “wonder” (mirari or thaumazein) or “astonishment” the emotional condition of possibility of philosophy. Only by experiencing it could an individual begin to learn about him- or herself and the world.57 There first needed to be curiosity, admiration, perplexity, a feeling of wonder suspending the thinking individual between knowledge and ignorance. In his Metaphysics, Aristotle asserts that it is only by seeking out the causes that are at first incomprehensible or that escape our knowledge that the destruction of wonder and admiration (admiratio) can come about: “[...] wonder should lead to its own replacement by knowledge (scientia) or philosophia.”58 Such a definition seems particularly useful when considering Dorléans’s description of his reaction to the king’s almost unconceivable greatness: he is himself at the beginning of a quest for clarity about his past and his relationship to the king, and his admiration and wonder are symptomatic of this new transformation.

Dorléans’s repentance was not without ambiguities. Unlike the imagined and idealized version of repentance we saw in Le ligueur repenti, Dorléans’s Remerciement au roy let slip many of the misgivings he still had about the king, particularly when it

57 “[...] for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.” (Plato, Theaetetus 155c-d, tr. Benjamin Jowett)

came to his good fortune. On the one hand, he seemed to rejoice in the fact that despite fortune’s notorious fickleness, it had not abandoned the king since his accession to the throne: “[la fortune] qui aime la nouveauté, et qui est legere, inconstante, n’a eu jamais aucun arrete en ses actions. Mais en vostre personne, il semble qu’elle s’y est arrestee pour y demeurer.”\(^{59}\) But there was also something unusual about his “estrange conciliation de Fortune” and the way in which the opposing political parties in France—both Protestants and Catholics (including Leaguers)—had suddenly agreed so willingly to accept the king’s rule:

Car les deux partis, ont jetté l’un contre l’autre, tout ce qu’ils avoient de roideur ; et de puissance. Et apres avoir bien bouilli et escumé de cholere, apres qu’ils se sont bien brouillez en rencontres, et en batailles : à la fin, le tout s’est composé et converty à vostre recoignoissance et vous a-t-on receu à la Royauté. […] Voilà donc de grande et merveilleuses prosperitez en vostre Royauté: mais voilà une Majesté esclose, avec une grande contention et variation, voire avec une estrange conciliation de Fortune. Car le Clergé qui auparavant vous redoutoit, vous a demandé, la Noblesse qui vous laissoit, vous a esleu : la Justice qui vous abandonnoit vous a voulu : le peuple qui vous fuyoit, vous a recherché, et peut-on dire que vous avez esté les vœux, le desir, et le souhait universel, de tout le Royaume de France.\(^{60}\)

If he had once been dreaded, abandoned, and hated by the Three Estates, Henri IV had now suddenly become desired, elected. Such an unexpected reconciliation with the French people appeared almost as if God had played a trick on them:

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\(^{60}\) Louis Dorléans, *Remerciement au roy*, 38, 40. “C’est que les loix, les Rois, les Princes, les Provinces, les Estats, les villes, les grands et les petits, les riches et les pauvres, les jeunes et les vieux, tous vous abandoanoient : et neantmoins quelque temps apres, et par vostre valeur, constance, et patience, tous ils ont esté constraints de vous rechercher et se prosterner devant vostre Royalle Majeste ?” (Ibid., 39-40) See also: “De moy quand je viens à considerer par quels moyens vous y estes entré [en France], c’est où je fonds en merveilles, et plus j’y trouve de contradictions, plus je revere les hautes conditions où vostre bon heur vous a porté. Car vos ennemis ont fait ce que fit celuy qui (pensant oster la vie à un homme, qu’il haïssoit) la lui donna : et qui au lieu de luy planter le poignard dans le cceur, et le traverser de part, en part, luy creva et traversa une apostume qui le faisoit mourir : et contre son intention, il sauva la vie à celuy dont il vouloit la mort. Ce qui ne s’est fait sans une grande prudence de Dieu, et sans faire esmerveiller tout l’Univers spectateur de nos tragedies. Car ce coup a esté le plus nompareil coup, qui ait esté tiré, je ne diray point de nostre temps, mais de fort long temps auparavant.” (Ibid., 38-39.)
Croyez moy, Sire, qu’il semblloit que le Ciel se jouast des hommes, et qu’il les eut aveuglez pour se rire de leur cecité. Car ils [les gens] se degoustoient pour vous aimer, ils vous laissoient pour vous rechercher, ils vous fuyoient pour vous approcher, voire pour vous voir au plus haut degré d’honneur, où Prince entra jamais de nostre temps. Ceux qui pensoient vous voir aux pieds, vous voient à la teste, et ceux à qui vous n’estiez rien, vous ont honoré comme leur Roy. Merveilleuse action de la providence de Dieu, qui dedans son estroict secret, vous tenoit caché, pour un jour, vous publier et preposer au genre humain, et contre l’opinion de tant de François, vous faire Roy des François.  

Those who had once disdainfully looked down upon the king were now groveling at his feet, and those who had once fled and abandoned him, were now seeking him out. Against the opinion of “tant de François,” God had made him king. Not least astonishing was the rapidity with which the people had gone from dissention to obedience. On the one hand, Dorléans described these swift conversions as something that was linked to the natural passage of time, which can change the course of all things: “C’est ainsi que le temps deffacit, et refait toutes choses. Car il est comme la Crocute [Crocodile] d’Egypte, de la dent il rompt tout, de l’estomach, il digere tout.”  

On the other hand, he seemed to suggest that there was something unsettling about the people’s willingness to accept the king so quickly:

Est-il pas veritable que l’on n’a pas attendu que vous fussiez au throsne de la Royauté, que l’on vous y a plustôt porté, qu’on n’y avoit pensé, que les villes, et les Provinces, vous ont plustot receu que demandé, plustot honoré que regardé, afin de coupper tout à coup, les nœuds ambigus, et enveloppez, de nos fascheuses controverses. Vous avez comme le figuier d’Inde, plustot receu le fruict que les fueilles.

61 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 39-40.
62 Ibid., 40.
63 Ibid.
It is as if Henri IV had skipped a step in the natural process of things: he had been carried to the throne before having claimed it, welcomed into the cities before asking, honored before having been examined to see if he were truly worthy. Although this collective acceptance of the king had the effect of severing “les nœuds ambigus” that remained, of ending the controversies, Dorléans seemed to think that Henri IV’s accession had somehow been premature, accomplished before he had the chance to show his worth—like a tree giving flowers and fruit before having borne its leaves (“Vous avez comme le figuier d’Inde, plutôt reçu le fruit que les feuilles”). Part of Dorléans’s ambivalence may have stemmed from the fact that he had struggled for many years, suffering the miseries of exile while he tried to determine whether or not Henri IV was worthy of the crown, whereas the people, unreflective and servile, had immediately accepted him. To make sense of this, Dorléans turned to the theory of the coincidence of opposites, or coincidentia oppositorum:

C’est la coutume de Dieu immortel, en ses divines actions d’opérer par les contraires, et non par les semblables. Car il fait ses opérations de médecine, comme fait Hippocrate, et non Paracelse. S’il veut guérir, et curer une cécité naturelle, il fait du crachat et de la bouë, dont il les charge et les embroûille, et semble plutost les vouloir obscurcir, que les esclaircir. S’il veut eslever du grain et en faire fruit, il le fait pourrir et consommer dedans la terre. S’il a envie de faire verdir un beau Printemps, il envoie un fort Hyver, qui couvre tout de glaces, qui mange tout le verd, qui ne laisse que les branches des arbres, et les plantes en leur nudité […].

It was as if Hippocrates’s theory of medicine, based on the balance of opposing humors (hot and cold, dry and wet, etc.), had been applied to the body politics. Just as he could cure blindness with mud and spit, create plants bearing fruit by sowing rotted seeds, and bring about a fertile and abundant spring through the harshness of winter, God had united

64 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 36-37.
the people of France by choosing actions that at first glance appeared irreconcilable with common sense. Such a theory was meant to explain Henri IV’s spiritual transformation. A kind of *pharmakon* figure, he had appeared to be a poison at first, destroying the country with his advocacy of Protestantism, but after his conversion, he had revealed himself as the very remedy that would heal the nation. Out of what appeared to be *discordia* had come *concordia*. Comparing the king to a poison transformed into a medicine could suggest an indirect condemnation of the king’s past faults. But Dorléans claimed he evoked his past only to elevate him even more greatly: “*Permettez moy SIRE, s’il vous plaist, que je descende au plus creux de vostre basse fortune, pour faire cognoistre sa sublevation. Car la fortune pour vous faire sentir son sucre plus doux, vous a fait boire quelquefois un doigt d’absynthe.*” What are we to make of the extraordinary “*sublevation*” of Henri IV? From a doctrine of “contraries” to a discourse on his “*basse fortune*,” bitter and unpalatable like a shot of absinthe, Dorléans clearly still wants to intimate that the monarch, before his divine election—which had been as dazzling as it had been unexpected—had first had to know the peril of inheriting a difficult political situation, one that could very well have led him to lose himself entirely:

Souvenez-vous donc SIRE, en quel estat vous estiez, apres la mort du Roy Monseigneur vostre Pere [Antoine de Navarre]. Pensez à qui vous aviez affaire, en l’an 1568, quelle puissance vous aviez à combattre, et avec qui vous estiez.

65 The mixing of such dangerous medicines—a metaphor of the political parties in France—also played a factor in creating such a “*bon et salubre medicament*” for the realm: “On ne jouït point de la myrrhe qui ne l’incise, et l’encens ne se peut avoir sans fraction. Je me represente en vostre Roiauté, la composition d’un insigné medicament, où il entre tant de drogues naturellement contraires les unes aux autres, et qui mises en un pot ensemble apres qu’elles ont bien bouilli et escumé, et qu’elles ont jeté l’une contre l’autre, tout ce qu’elles avoient de force, et de vertu naturelle: finalement s’accoident, et se meslans ensemble, convertissent leur suc, leur force, et toute leur substance, en la confection d’un bon et salubre medicament.” (*Ibid.*, 39-40.)

Jugez l’estat de vostre maison, la tendresse de vostre jeunesse, et les grandes affaires que vous aviez sur les bras. Quand je vous ramentoy cecy, ce n’est pas pour vous deprimer. C’est pour exprimer d’avantage, combien Dieu a basti vostre grandeur sur une basse et perilleuse descente. Et croy que lisant ceci, vous en songerez davantage, que je n’en şcauroye escrire. Aussi que je ne veux remuer ce qui gist bien, et qui est heureusement enseveli. Mais approchons plus près de vostre grandeur, qui est la Royauté. Car ces troubles ont esté cause de vostre fortune. La France pendant nos desordres, s’est veuë à la verité en de grands, et perilleux destroits, voire aux derniers abois de sa vie. Elle a senti des accez de fièbre bien chauds, et bien violens.67

Alluding to the fact that Henri IV’s military career had taken off under the Protestant leadership of the Prince de Condé and Gaspard Coligny, Dorléans makes it a point to draw the reader’s attention to the calamitous effect the actions he had partaken in had had on France. While defending himself from ever wanting to bring him back down to where he had been (“ce n’est pas pour vous deprimer”) or to stir up the happily buried past (“je ne veux remuer ce qui gist bien, et qui est heureusement enseveli”), Dorléans still reminds the king that his greatness, by the will of God, was built on “une basse et perilleuse descente,” as well as the suffering of others (“ces troubles ont esté cause de vostre fortune”). After all, the wars had almost been the death of the nation (“La France pendant nos desordres, s’est veuë à la verité en de grands, et perilleux destroits, voire aux derniers abois de sa vie”). Wresting with the enigma of this unexpected political resolution, Dorléans goes on to write, somewhat paradoxically, that he and the French love their past misfortunes because they have allowed the king to access the throne and bring tranquility to the land: “Toutefois s’il n’y avoit autre moyen que par nos intemperies de vous avoir à la Royauté, nous aimons la faute, et nos troubles nous plaisent, puisque c’est vous qui avez establi l’ordre, et fait raier dessus nous le Soleil de

67 Ibid., 39.
la tranquillité.” Such ambiguous statements show that Dorléans, while praising Henri IV, still could not entirely let go of his past faults. The narrative he provided was one of errors and ultimate redemption, structured in part like the hagiographies of old, which showed how sinners had become saints:

[...] O que maintesfois j’ay detesté le malheur qui vous avoit porté en ce perilleux chemin. Combien de fois j’ay maudit ceste Fortune enchanteresse, qui vous avoit de ses charmes esblouys les yeux. Combien de fois ceste Circé, qui par la force de ses herbes, et mauvais venins, vous avoit tournée la pensee, afin de vous fourvoier. Mais Dieu soit loué, qu’à present vous estes au chemin, où l’Esprit de Dieu vous conduit avec asserurance, et auquel tous les gens de bien vous desiroyent.

Je ne crains point, SIRE, de dire ce que vous avez esté : quand à present nous scâvons tous, et publions ce que vous estes. Aussi les fautes de nostre humanité corrigees, ne sont plus fautes, mais vertu : la verité opposée à l’erreur, a plus de lustre, et l’amendement apparié à la faute, a de l’honneur d’avantage. Car de faillir à l’homme, c’est fragilité, mais de se recognoistre, c’est divinité. Les grands hommes ont plus acquis d’honneur en leurs cheutes, qu’estant debout, et plus estant par terre, qu’estant sur pieds. L’Eglise a plus honoré la negation de sainct Pierre, estant deuëment ploree et corrigée, qu’on n’a faict sa confession ouvertement et animosement prononcee. Vous diray-je, SIRE, qu’on a plus parlé de la reparation du monde, qu’on n’a faict de sa creation? J’adjousterai, que ceste reparation a esté plus admirable, que la creation n’estoit incomprehensible et incroyable. Entre les Payens, la reconciliation de Coriolanus à sa patrie, lui a plus acquis de reputation, que toutes les victoires qu’il eu jamais sur les Gaulois. [...]69

On the one hand, Dorléans claimed that he had no fear of exposing the monarch’s sinful past because he had repented: what could cast more luster on him and make him more honorable than having overcome his errors and matched his faults with their appropriate amendment? In his telling of Henri IV’s redemption, Dorléans’s reference to Saint Peter

68 Ibid.

69 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 42v. “Je ne crains point, SIRE, de publier le passé, quand le present vous sert de trophées. Nous confesserons franchement votre absolution, pour ce que nous l’estimons plus gorieuse que vostre simple conversion. On vous confesse autresfois ennemi, afin qu’à meilleur titre on vous tienne pour protecteur, et pour ami.” (Ibid.)
was not a coincidence. Perhaps the most important of Christ’s disciples, Peter had denied Jesus three times before finally accepting him. Hadn’t the king also taken a long time, going back and forth, before becoming a Catholic for good? But more importantly, what the ex-Leaguer draws our attention to here is the fact that St. Peter’s tears of repentance and amendment were more celebrated in the Church than his confession. Known as the “rock” (*Petrus* or *Petros* in Greek), which some have interpreted as the sign of his new-founded stability, he had been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven as well as the power to bind or loose sin on earth (Mathews 16:18-19). He had become the archetype of the forgiven sinner. What a more powerful figure of repentance could Dorléans have chosen to compare Henri IV to than St. Peter? Just like him, the king had received more honor in his fall from grace and reconciliation with God than if he had remained steadfast and faithful all along.

*On the other hand,* there is something again very ambiguous in the way in which Dorléans tells Henri IV’s tale of redemption. Although he professes to evoke the king’s past faults as not truly his own but the result of errors imposed on him by fortune (just as Odysseus had been bewitched by the goddess of sorcery, Circe, on his voyage home), the ex-Leaguer’s mere mention of them is two-edged: they are both the condition of redemption *and* something that he perhaps should continue atoning for. Throughout the *Remerciement au roy* Dorléans returns to the monarch’s fault. Unlike the majority of Royalists, Dorléans seemed to be still preoccupied with the state of the king’s soul, continuously reminding him of his past errors even in his encomium. One way of interpreting such unwillingness to let the past be past, would be to say that it was a way for Dorléans to channel some remnants of resistance he still harbored towards his old
enemy. But another, perhaps more convincing reading is also possible. Couldn’t it be that
Dorléans needed to reflect on the king’s faults in order to make better sense of his own?
If Henri IV’s repentance, like St. Peter’s, had turned his fortunes so spectacularly, it
hadn’t quite been the case for Dorléans. His repentance couldn’t be elevated by triumph.
A Leaguer, he understood that had chosen the wrong side of history and that he would
never truly be able to escape his past in the same way that the king had done. He
described himself as being worse off than a fugitive woman from Getulia who, after
having found herself alone in the woods and faced with a lioness ready to devour her, had
prostrated before the animal and asked for mercy. Instead of pouncing, the creature,
moved by pity (“douceur”), had spared her life. His own fate, Dorléans wrote, had not
turned out to be as happy as hers. He had been metaphorically devoured in his exile:

“Mais ma cruelle fortune n’est pas ainsi, car plus j’ay eu de mal, plus elle m’en a faict, et
son cœur n’a peu s’assouvir que par le total de ma ruine.”

If there was meaning to be sought in this absolute ruin, it was only in the fact that it had allowed God and Henri IV
to lift him from the abyss into which he had fallen:

Toutefois il n’est mal dont Dieu ne tire quelque bien. Il falloit que le malheur
m’affligeast cruellement, pour me relever plus glorieusement par vostre
destre. J’avois vos lettres en la main, comme l’abeille a la pierre au pied, pour
me sauver de la tempeste. Mais Dieu a permis que ce remede a esté vain, pour
faire paroistre la sincerité de vostre cœur, et la parole que vous m’aviez
donnée. Or je loue Dieu, et vous, de ma deliverance, laquelle je ne puis exalter
sans parler de ma prison. Je louë la santé selon le mal, et selon la mesure de la
douceur je recommande mon remede. Car il y a plus d’honneur de guerir un
appoplectique qu’un simple febricitant, et plus de gloire de delivrer de prison,
que de desengager d’une simple debte.

70 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 85r. “[…] c’estoit assez d’avoir esté neuf ans en un lointain exil,
sans que mon mal-heur me donnast recharge. […] mon chef battu et rebattu de tant de maux, est le vrai
tableau de mon infortune. Qui est la vérité tres-dure, cruelle, et implacable.” (Ibid., 84v.)

71 Ibid., 85r.
Here, the ex-Leaguer confesses that it had only been after Henri IV had freed him from prison that he had become truly convinced that he could trust his word (“parole donnée”) and his character: “[...] vostre coeur s’est tourné sur le costé droit, et a embrassé la foy qu’il m’avoit promise.” In the end, the great misfortunes he had experienced had made him recognize his own fault. It thus appears that one of the main reasons why so many pages in Remerciement au roy are filled discussing Henri IV’s fortunes along with his own was because they were so profoundly interconnected. Henri IV’s conversion lay at the heart of Dorléans’s own guilt. The fact that he had publically and violently questioned the sincerity of Henri IV’s spiritual transformation had led to remorse when he had finally come to be convinced that it had not been feigned. And his guilt had only been compounded when he had started thinking that his unkind fate was itself a sign of his disgrace from God. Hence, despite the ambiguity of his statements about the king’s good fortune compared to his own, it was ultimately this very reasoning that convinced him he was in the wrong and needed to repent. Sufferings had elevated Henri IV and led him to repentance, and so must his own, even if he could never hope to reach the selfless glory of his benefactor. Ovid’s words from Tristia indeed seems fitting: “Clearly, among the gods, even ill-fortune must be atoned for, nor is mischance an excuse when a deity is wronged.”

If Dorléans’s own disgrace had been a lesson of humility, meant to force him to recognize his fault and lead him to reconciliation with the king, it was also the starting point of his atonement.

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72 Ovid, Tristia; Ex Ponto, 63.
Although he had already admitted his faults to the king in the letter he had sent him to be pardoned ("Je ne m'excuse point de mes fautes passées, car je les reconnais [...]"), Dorléans’s confession in the Remerciement au roy was different insofar as it was a way to *publicly* acknowledge them. But again, nothing, here, is straightforward: his repentance was in fact also a declaration of innocence. In order to explain his past rebellion, Dorléans pointed out that his actions had been the result of poor judgment more than anything else. He had lacked the proper insight to recognize the truth:

> Et vous confesserez, que si vous ne m’eussiez prevenu par vostre bonté, j’estois encor pour faire d’avantage. Quantes-fois m’avez vous donné la main, pour me faire reconnoistre, quantes-fois m’avez vous fait advertir, de penser à moi ? Et toutes-fois mes yeux ne pouvoient voir, ni mes oreilles ouïr, ce que ma main depuis a senti. Le seul amour de ma religion (et Dieu le sçait lui qui tout sçait) me faisoit tenir ferme en mes resolutions.\(^\text{73}\)

If Henri IV’s “*bonté*” had not succeeded in convincing him of the legitimacy of his rule, Dorléans admits that he would have continued on his stubborn path of resistance, unable to see what was in front of him or to hear what was being said. In the end, he had almost had to feel the truth with his hand, like doubting Thomas. Far from being the consequence of his bad temperament, or his malicious soul, his failure to understand Henri IV’s real nature had only stemmed from his exalted devotion to God:

> Et certes, j’ay faict pour l’honneur de Dieu, et pour l’Eglise, ce que Caton faisoit en ses guerres sa Republique. Car j’ay crié desesperement, j’ay frappé cruellement, je n’ay desmarché nullement. La visiere baissee, je ne cognissois personne, non pas vostre Majesté SIRE, qu’à present j’honore, et je sers apres Dieu. [...] Mais j’estois un pauvre Catholique insensé d’amour, qui bruslois d’affection envers ma religions, et qui craignois le peril, dont Dieu l’a par vous

\(^\text{73}\) Louis Dorléans, *Remerciement au roy*, 40v.–41r.
seul miraculeusement delivree. Je ne pouvois comprendre ce que je voy, et qu’à present je sçay, et je sens de vostre Majesté.  

Impetuous like a knight with a lowered visor, in the blind craze of battle, Dorléans had been but a soldier defending his religion. He had only written against the king in the belief that he was protecting Religion, God, and the Church: “[…] Si j’ai escrit, c’estoit pour ma religion. Si j’ai escrit, c’estoit en la cause de Dieu. Si j’ai escrit, c’estoit pour deffendre l’Eglise. […] Voyla la seule cause qui m’a faict jetter en campagne, et mettre la plume sur le papier.” Nothing could have convinced him at the time to accept the slightest form of compromise:

Quantefois m’a-on sollicité de changer de parti, et quantefois m’y a-on excité, soit par argent, soit par ambitieuses promesses ? Mais j’ay mieux aimé rompre, que torder. Ni l’or ne me gaignoit, ni la peur ne m’estonnoit, ni la force ne me surmontoit. Tout perissoit, que j’avois le cœur ferme. J’estoit fait du bois de la navire d’Argo, je ne craignois ni l’eau ni le feu, resolution de ne plus vivre, ma religion perduë. En ceste estat, j’ay tiré tous les coups que j’ay peu, et faict ce que le temps me permettoit, et la licence. Non que vous m’eussiez faict tort. Car, SIRE, quel tort m’auriez vous faict, vous qui m’avez procuré tant d’honneur, et tant de bien par vostre bien-veillance. Vous en avez le cœur net, et les mains lavees.

Comparable in that regard to Cato the Younger, a figure with whom, as we have seen, he had already identified in De suo exilio, Dorléans claimed that he had been immune to the corruptive power of money and had never been motivated by self-interest. On the contrary, he had thought it better to sever ties with those who had been corrupted than to be forced to bend under their will (“j’ay mieux aimé rompre, que torder”). He had remained steadfast despite believing that his religion was lost (“ma religion perduë”) and

74 Ibid., 41r.

75 Ibid., 77v-78r.
that everything was coming to an end ("Tout perissoit, que j’avois le cœur ferme"). He had not thrown himself into the thick of battle with gaiety of heart, but out of a "juste crainte [...] de perdre sa religion." His actions had been borne out fear and perceived necessity.

If Dorléans is supposed to be admitting his errors, what a strange confession indeed this is, that takes the form of excuses, that returns again and again to the idea that at heart he was innocent: he had erred in good faith. To be sure, he claimed that he was a changed man and that it was for this reason that he was not ashamed to publish his Remerciement au roy: "Je n’ay point de honte de publier ce que j’ay esté, quand chacun voit à present qui je suis, et ce que je suis." But the truth was that he had never had anything to hide:

Et certes je puis lever les mains en haut, et puis attester toutes les puissances celestes, et dessus toutes, cet œil redoutable de la Majesté de Dieu, cet œil qui perce tout, qui penetre tout, et qui est dessus, et espandu par tout : c’est œil qui nous sonde jusques à la profondeur des reins, que j’ay tousjours purement et honnестement vescu selon les hommes. Je dis selon les hommes. Car devant Dieu ma netteté n’est que souillure. [...] Et si l’on considere ma vie en mon privé, si on la prend en public, on ne me trouvera jamais autre. J’ai toujours esté sur le carré de l’innocence, duquel ni les tempestes publiques, ni les calomnies particulières, ni les hommes, ni le temps, ni la force, ni l’argent, ne m’ont jamais sceu debouter [débouter]. [...] comme le vieil Publicola, je leur ouvriray mes fenestres de toutes parts, afin qu’ils puissent scavoir comme j’ay versé avec mes domestiques, et pour me foüiller en l’interieur, de mes plus secrettes actions en ma maison. Peut-estre qu’ils trouveront en mon nid, comme au nid de l’Aigle, des pierres précieuses.

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76 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 61. “Combien y en a-il (disoit Ciceron) qui se sont jettez aux troubles plus par une juste crainte, que par gayeté de cœur ? combien aussi qui se sont enveloppez dans les torrens des guerres civiles sans y penser ? Je dis une juste crainte, comme de perdre sa religion. Croiez, SIRE, que si ceste crainte n’eust esté, mon remument n’eust jamais esté. Car s’il y a rien qui ait puissance sur nos esprits, s’il y a pointe qui nous perce de part en part, c’est ceste-là.” (Ibid.)

77 Ibid., 40v-41r.

78 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 64.
Following the doctrine of original sin, Dorléans recognizes here that, like all men, he is impure before God, but refuses to believe that he has ever been falsehearted. In spite of the important role he played in the Holy League wars as their avocat général de la Ligue, he affirms that he cannot be criticized for having at any time lacked in moral integrity, whether in his private or public life. His innocence is irrefutable, absolute. If need be, he would open his house like Publicola had done, to show what lay in its farthest recesses. He would unveil his conscience, allowing his witnesses to recognize him as blameless, and perhaps even as pure and beautiful as precious stones ("[…] ils trouveront en mon nid, comme au nid de l’Aigle, des pierres précieuses"). If an author like Montaigne believed that it was rare to come across someone whose private conscience or "patron au-dedans" was in order ("C’est une vie esquise, celle qui se maintient en ordre jusques en son privé"), Dorléans was convinced it was in his case and was willing to go to great lengths to prove it. His nine years of exile hadn’t changed him, he claimed. In fact, the only true pleasure he had felt during those difficult years had been in the thought that he was still living righteously: "Car osté le plaisir que j’avois d’avoir bien vescu, je n’avois un seul brin de plaisir, et mon seul plaisir gisoin ma conscience." In this strange confession, Dorléans doesn’t hesitate to bring in witnesses to his character. He

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80 Ibid., 808. “Peu d’hommes ont esté admirez par leurs domestiques.” (Ibid.)

81 Louis Dorléans, Remerciement au roy, 67.
writes that the strangers amongst whom he had lived had praised two things about him, his virtuous life and his fortitude in his misfortune: “Je puis dire toutefois que les estrangers ont loué deux choses en moy, ma vie et ma constance contre la fortune.”

Adversity had not tainted his honor (“elle n’a rien emporté sur mon honneur”). Able to testify as well on his character were the many good and powerful people who—far from having abandoned or forgotten him, as would have been the case for most people in such circumstances (“La prosperité d’un homme perdu, ne fait plus d’amis”)—had interceded on his behalf before the king:

Mais je remercie Dieu de ne m’avoir tant destitué, qu’il ne me restast encore des personnes, et proches de vostre Majesté, pour tesmoigner de moy et de mes mœurs. Je dis des personnes non petites de qualité, mais grandes en authorité : personnes recommandes pour leurs vertus, et non detestées pour leurs vices. C’est un reste de mon premier honneur, lequel, ou ma triste fortune n’avoit encor veu pour me l’oster, ou qu’elle n’avoit peu si tost le dissoudre.

Proof of all proofs when it came to his innocence, the king himself, Dorléans went on to argue, recognized that his actions had been the byproduct of the confusion and chaos of civil war: “[…] ainsi par un grand cœur avez-vous passé ce que j’avois escrit, scachant que ce n’estoit que l’escume de nos troubles, et les bondissements de nos desordres.”

Just as other gentle souls who had been caught up in the ardor of the moment, he could

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82 Ibid., 70.
83 Ibid. As has been noted by Michael Wolfe, “League noblemen wanted to make it clear that their allegiance to Henri IV marked the culmination of their oath to defend the Church, not its betrayal” (Michael Wolfe, The Conversion of Henri IV. Politics, Power, and Religious Belief in Early Modern France, 176.)
84 Ibid., 81.
85 Ibid., 86.
hardly be accused of having intentionally rebelled: “Car comme le miel en esté boult et escume, aussi les ames plus doules s’enflent souz le chaud des civiles émotions.”

Henri IV knew that he had not truly committed a crime, but merely loved his religion: “Aussi jugiez-vous assez, que mon crime n’estoit pas crime, que ce n’estoit qu’amour et juste amour envers ma religion.” This was the reason why, receiving him at court upon his return from exile, he had saluted him as a man of honor in front of witnesses of the best quality:

Ce fut lors SIRE, qu’ouvrant vostre bouche, vous me distes en la presence de plusieurs Princes, Seigneurs, et Gentils-hommes qui vous assistoient, QUE J’AVOIS TOUSJOURS ESTE HOMME DE BIEN, ET QUE JE LE FUSSE ENCORE D’AVANTAGE. Que pensez-vous SIRE ? que me pleurent ces paroles, et combien elles me furent advantageuses et honorables?

Dorléans had been so happily surprised by this unexpected gesture of good faith, that it had reminded him of the story of an elm tree from Nocerea cut at the top and already bowing, which had suddenly risen and opened his flowers when a prosperous wind had blown over it, giving it a second life. The king had restored his dignity:

Ce n’estoit point simples paroles, que ce que j’entendois, mes arrests hautement et honorablement prononcez par vostre bouche sur la contestation de mon innocence. C’estoit arrests prononcez de la vive voix d’un Prince, et d’un Prince aussi grand entre les Princes et les Rois, qu’est un Soleil entre les estoiles. […] O que j’ay de regret de ne les pouvoir escrire en lettres d’or, pour les enchasser selon leur merite. Mais si ce papier peut devenir une bronze, je desire, voire je le conjure, qu’il les tesmoigne à la posterité. Du moins, mon cœur sera l’air[ain] qui les conservera tant que je vive. Je jure à votre Majesté, SIRE, que

86 Ibid., 83.

87 Ibid., 88.

88 “Je me ressouvins lors, de ceste Orme de Nocerea, qui couppé par le teste, et courbé comme mort, sous un vent prospere, soudain se releva, et espanit des fleurs, arguments certains de sa seconde vie.” (Ibid., 88v)
tout ce que j’avois souffert ne m’estoit plus rien, quand j’eus ouy une absolution si honorable, et si veritable.\textsuperscript{89}

While he couldn’t go as far as to inscribe Henri IV’s “honorable declaration de [ses] moeurs et de [sa] vie”\textsuperscript{90} in letters of gold, Dorléans at least held the hope that his text would resist the degradation of time and act as a witness to his innocence for posterity. In the end, he was satisfied with the thought that his own heart, solid as bronze, would at least keep the king’s words alive throughout his lifetime.

In the end, what are we to make of this unusual confession, which we have now explored in some detail? Dorléans was decidedly concerned with the damage his reputation had suffered, which he intended to repair while at the same time praising the king for his generosity and gentleness. Dorléans knew that he had not been “exempt des calomnies”\textsuperscript{91} and that there had been no shortage of “langues envieuses”\textsuperscript{92} seeking to slander him either while he was in exile or upon his return to France. Such libelous reports, he believed, had brought him undeserved ill repute and he clearly hoped that his *Remerciement au roy* would counteract their purchase on public opinion. His insistence on his virtue was one of the centerpieces of his defense, the other being the fact that the king himself had vouched for him—or so, at least, Dorléans claimed.\textsuperscript{93} His defense didn’t

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 88v.-89r.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 89r.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 70r. “[…] j’ai senti la dent de tels calomniateurs.” (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 70r.

\textsuperscript{93} In fact, I have found no evidence suggesting that the king pardoned him so graciously and in such a public manner. It is important to distance ourselves from Dorléans’s rhetoric here since there were authors,
just concern the present. Recognizing that he had played his cards wrong and most likely fearing that he would go on to be only known for his rebellion against the king rather than his devoutness and his poems, he was also trying to restore his reputation for posterity’s sake. He was writing a new narrative of penance—one that was replete with ambiguities and difficulties. In a way, he had to be both guilty and innocent. Imagining repentance in such a way is not as strange as it may at first appear to be. One only needs to be reminded here of one of its most important elements: confession as a means of erasing the past and freeing an individual from moral guilt. This aspect of the rite was clearly of great significance for Dorléans whose *Remerciement au roy* can in and of itself be understood as a performance of atonement seeking to repair past offenses, even if such an act did not mean sacrificing what he believed to be the truth both about his own past and the king’s:

>`Autresfois en ay je escrit ce qui en estoit, et maintenant l’ai-je publié de bouche, comme je l’atteste encore particulièrement par cet escrit. Il sera l’esponge, qui effacera cet ancre, tombee sur la blancheur de mon papier. De mescontentment, je n’en ay point, et n’en puis avoir, je remets tout comme vous me l’avez remis : Et la debonnaireté que j’ay receuë de vostre Majesté par une main, je la rends de l’autre […]`\(^94\)

Forgiving the king for his Protestant past, in the same manner that he had been pardoned by him for having been a Leaguer, Dorléans had returned the monarch’s benevolent gesture by writing the *Remerciement au roy*. It would, like a sponge, wipe away the dark blotches of ink that had fallen upon his unadulterated white page. With this striking image, he describes both his fault and innocence: his incendiary writings of the past had such as Pierre de l’Etoile or Pierre-Victor Palma-Cayet, who stated that the king had not been so generous to the most notorious of Leaguers, among whom was Jean Boucher.

\(^94\) Louis Dorléans, *Remerciement au roy*, 84.
been almost authorless, ink splattered onto the page, accidents that could be corrected with the publication of *Remerciement au roy*. While his confession seems to recognize past faults without fully taking on the guilt associated with them, we shouldn’t dismiss it as false repentance. This was still very much penitential writing, and Dorléans showed himself profoundly engrossed in the process. By extolling the figure he had once condemned, the ex-Leaguer, even when he did not appear entirely remorseful, was in a way imposing on himself an important part of penitence, something resembling the works of satisfaction. He was paying back the debt he believed he owed the king. The fact that he had written an almost two hundred-page text in order to both accuse and exonerate himself is enough to suggest that he had accepted the *idea* of his faults—even if they had not been, according to him, the result of ill-intent but only of his love of God. In a way, it seems that Royalists—whom, as we have seen, sought to force repentance upon those who had opposed the king—had succeeded in convincing Leaguers like Dorléans to commit to the exercise. A recurring military metaphor that Dorléans uses in *Remerciement au roy* only makes this more evident. Likening his experience to a battle, he describes himself as a soldier who has been vanquished. But instead of understanding this defeat negatively, as humiliation, he submits to the conqueror willingly, rejoicing in having become a trophy: “*Je vous donne gagné. Et puis que la fortune vous a tout fait vaincre, et que vous le meritez, je veux estre vaincu de vous, et confesse que moy et mes raisons ne sommes rien. Au contraire, nous nous jettons ensemble à vos pieds, pour vous servir de trophee.*”95 This military metaphor is in fact crucial to understanding the paradoxical resolution at work in Dorléans’s expression of repentance:

95 *Ibid.*, 84.
Que pensez-vous, Sire, l’aise que j’eus, de me voir abbatu par le torrent de vostre prosperité, et mis aux pieds de vostre bonne Fortune ? Car mon deshonneur a esté mon honneur, mon malheur a esté mon bon-heur, ma honte a esté ma gloire, ma perte, mon gain, et ma desroute, le laurier de ma victoire, et la palme immortelle de ma bataille. Je me resjouïs de me voir sous vos pieds et de m’y voir avec tant de despouilles ennemies, tant d’enseignes, tant de guidons, tant d’escus, et tant d’espées, qu’on voit entre vos trophées. J’ai contentement de voir blotti le petit tuyau de ma plume abbatuë, sous le cours de vostre bien-heureuse magnanimité.96

Dorléans was not being ironic when he described himself as one of Henri IV’s spoils of war. This submission to monarchical authority, which almost seemed to turn Dorléans into an object and a symbol, was meant to validate the complete conversion he had undergone. He was now praising the dishonor, misfortune, shame, and loss he had once endured: they were the means by which his spiritual transformation had been accomplished. Who could be more penitent than a soldier who humbled himself so greatly, rejoicing at his defeat? Repentance and obedience were welded into the same complex discourse. The day he had decided to return to France and recognize him as king (“vous recoognistre”97) was the day Dorléans had become one of his most loyal vassals:

Je dis que ce jour me fut heureux, pource que je devins vostre vassal, voire vostre tres-humble et tres-fidelle serviteur. Et comme les abeilles s’appróchent ordinairement de leur Roy, et ne peuvent vivre sans Roy, aussi deslors je courbay ma teste à vos pieds, je ploia y le genoüil devant vostre face. Et bien que je fusse en pays estranger, si est-ce que mon esprit vous recoignoist pour mon Prince souverain. Ouy, je vous recoignoisis pour mon Roy, et sans faire tort à ceux qui

96 Ibid., 44v-45r. “Voyla donc la Puissance Sire, voyla la Clemence que Dieu vous a donnée, comme il les donne en appenage aux bons Roys, qui sont les nourrissons et chers enfans de sa divinité. Je les ay experimentées toutes deux, pour ce que par la puissance, vous m’avez atterré et par la clemence vous m’avez relevé. En cela vous avez montré l’action d’une ame benigne, voire d’une ame divine. Car la main qui m’avoit blessé m’a guary, la hache qui m’avoit navré, a consolidé ma plaie. Maintenant que je n’ay que les vœux qui sont mon sacrifice du matin et du vespre, je les emploie tres-ardemment, et tres-volontairement pour vostre Majesté.” (Ibid., 90v-91r)

97 Ibid., 44r.
This declaration of loyalty represented more than just a traditional oath given by a vassal. It was a personal pledge of conversion and reconciliation. Dorléans compared himself to the enemies of emperor Augustus, whose loyalty had been reinforced by friendship and love:

Aussi fit-il [Auguste] experience de l’amour, et de la loyanté de ceux qui s’estoient reconciliez. Car il n’y en eut pas un qui ne luy fut autant amy, qu’auparavant il luy avoit esté enennemy. Et à la verité les membres renouez tiennent ordinairement plus fort que les autres. Pource que la nature desirant reparer une rupture, y apporte tant de secours, qu’ordinairement il s’y fait un gros cal, dont la partie se rend plus forte qu’elle n’estoit auparavant.99

What had once been broken was now mended in such a way that it would last longer, be stronger than before, like a callus that heals an injury. From foe to friend, a converted enemy made a stronger ally. Dorléans’s personal conversion had made him more faithful and obedient to Henri IV.

The End of Penance: Metaphors of Healing

In order to understand just how deep Dorléans’s atonement had run, it is essential to examine what we might call the third stage of his repentance. Two years after the

98 Ibid. “Sire, pour l’estroicte prison, dont vous m’avez tiré, Dieu vueille dilater et amplifier vostre Empire, autant et aussi glorieusement que fut amplifiee ceste vigne presageee de l’Emire des Perses, que songea Astiages estre sorte du ventre de sa fille. Ou bien que ceste arbre du songe Nabuchodonosor, soubs lequele se reposoient tous les oyseaux de la terre. Il n’i a figure de Mathematique, qui remplisse le triangle, que le triangle : aussi n’i a il chose au monde, qui puisse paier l’amour que l’amour. C’est-ce que je vous offre avec le vœu de mon humble service, pour eternelle obligation que j’ay à vostre Majesté.” (Ibid., 87v-88r)

99 Ibid., 56r-56v.
assassination of Henri IV, Dorléans published a text dedicated to Marie de Médicis called *La Plante Humaine, sur le trépas du roy Henry le grand*. Because of the single-mindedness with which he had used the plant metaphor—to re-explore his reconciliation with the king, sustaining it through an impressive five hundred pages when it could have fit the space of a poem—it was perhaps one of the most bizarre eulogies written at the time.\(^\text{100}\) Dorléans was again careful to claim that his was not a mere work of circumstance, but the product of a long and careful meditation. This explained why it was only being published a full year after the assassination:

> Que si l’on dit que j’ay trop attendu, je respond que qui vient bien, n’arrive jamais tard ; aussi, que chien hasté fais ses petits borgnes. Ils ne me scâuauroient accuser, sinon que je suis une cloche qui ay sonné l’heure apres les autres : mais qui vid jamais sonner toutes les heures ensembles ? Je vouloy voir ce que diroyent tous les autres, à fin que l’on jugeast de ce que je diroy apres les autres. En un mot, j’ay reservé à l’annuel ce que je pouvoy faire aux funerailles. Les Chrestiens avoyent plusieurs jours solennels au service des Morts, le premier, le troisiesme, le septiesme, le neuf, le trente, le quarante, le soixante, et l’annuel. J’ay laissé glisser les premiers pour parvenir au de rneriel, et y suis venu non par le grand chemin, par une sente non battue.\(^\text{101}\)

The text was clearly presented as a personal and careful reflection on the monarch, one that needed time and solitude to be brought to completion. It was not meant to be a perfunctory exercise, but something departing from the expected common-place images and metaphors expected in such circumstances. Dorléans declared he had chosen a less-

\(^\text{100}\) At the end of *La plante humaine*, Dorléans writes several poems praising Henri IV and lamenting his death. One of them is named *Conquestio de Morte Henri IV*.

trodden path: “le chemin me plait qui est solitaire.” He had sought inspiration in the woods, which provided him with the simple metaphors he needed to praise the dead king: “[...] c’est pourquoi je me suis sur ce subject retiré au plus espais des bois et des forests, et n’ay paré que d’arbres, et d’herbes, de fleurs, de feuilles, et de fruits que j’ay esbranchez, et espancez pour les jeter sur ce tombeau.” This setting had provided him with the thread that his eulogy would follow. As he explained in his dedication to Marie de Medicis, the monarch had been like a marvelous plant:

O MADAME ! la belle et noble plante qu’estoit en terre le feu Roy vostre mary : l’excellent arbre qu’il estoit dans les vergers de ce monde, et particulièrement dans l’enclos de ce grand parc de l’Europe. Le Soleil le salüoit en son levant, le fomentoit en son Midy, et en son couchant, il le laissoit, comme à regret on laisse une chose aymée. Chacun le reputoit comme un Soleil en terre, et comme une humaine divinité ou une divine humanité. De quelle grace estoit ceste plante Royalle, de quelle beauté son tronc, de quelle estenduë ses branches, de quelle vertu sa feuille, de quelle amoenité sa fleur, de quelle grace et bonté les fruits qu’il a portez, et dont la terre jouit en recompense de sa perte ?

If it is somewhat unexpected in that it differs from the more common medieval political metaphors Dorléans could have used—that of the body politic with the king as the head and the people as the body (a model that Hobbes would of course take up later in his own way in the *Leviathan*), or of the state as a ship with the king at its helm—the comparison of the king to a plant has not yet been pushed beyond what would normally be fitting for an encomium. After all, trees had been treated since the Middle Ages as

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102 Ibid., 477.

103 Ibid., 478.

104 Ibid., 29.

105 For a discussion of the later uses of the body politic metaphor, see also: Antoine de Baecque, *Le Corps de l’histoire. Métaphore et politique* (1770-1800), (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993.)
metaphors to represent and display royal *dignitas*. They had been associated with genealogy and kingship and had been used to highlight the transmission of power or exalt royalty by recalling origins. But in Dorléans’s text, Henri IV is portrayed as kin to the plant world in a more complicated way. Little by little, what appears to the reader is that botany becomes a multifaceted way of thinking not only about the king, but also about Dorléans’s past. Involving questions of exile, rootlessness, and transplantation, the botanical lens in fact allows him, as we will see, to formulate a new, different expression of his penance, as well as state in a very unexpected way his allegiance to the absolutist model that was already at work during the reign of Henri IV, as historians such as Arlette Jouanna and many others have shown. If *La plante humaine* represents an atypical eulogy, it is not merely because Dorléans sustains the plant metaphor throughout the entirety of the work, but also because it becomes a way in which he reflects on his past.

Perhaps the most important passage in *La plante humaine*, when it comes to shedding light on the way in which Dorléans chose to rewrite the narrative of his repentance after the king’s death, concerns the gardening technique called “*transplantation*.” In a discussion on the resemblances that exist between man and plants as they relate to the natural world and the afterlife, Dorléans states that one of the many relationships that “*les plantes vegetantes et les raisonnables*”106 have in common—and here he means plants, animals, and humans—is that they all take pleasure in traveling. Quoting Pliny the Elder, he states: “*Arborum et hominum natura peregrinationis*

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106 Dorléans, *La plante humaine*, 49.
They love to be “transplantées de leur sol naturel en un autre non moins bon que le premier, afin de jeter plus de feuilles, de fleurs, et de fruits, et de s’acroître de racine, de tronc, et de branches, et de donner des fruits de toutes parts.”¹⁰⁷ In order to illustrate this idea, Dorléans tells us the story of an important encounter he had had in the “pays Brabant,” which, as we know, had been his place of exile. Having heard of a distinguished bourgeois living near Brussels known as “un homme de lettres, de vertu, fort honneste et affable, et digne de la reputation qu’on luy donnoit,” he had become curious to see the man’s renowned garden, “remply de simples” which had come from all quarters of the world. In Dorléans’s words, this visit was a replaying of the ones Pliny the Elder had famously paid to Antonius Castor, a great doctor of his time who owned a celebrated botanical garden. Invited to visit the garden, Dorléans was shown an extraordinary tree: “Et lors il me monstra un de ces oliviers estant en un bout de la galerie, lequel me sembla merveilleusement beau ; mais ce qui m’esbahit, c’est qu’il avoit les fleurs noires, dont il estoit tout couvert, et les autres [oliviers] portoyent blanches comme lys.”¹⁰⁸ A long discussion then ensued between the men about the possible causes of its diversity. Dorléans’s first interpretation of its abnormality

¹⁰⁷ This is the quote that Dorléans gives, but it is a transformation of the original. In book XVII of Natural History, Pliny the Elder’s is in fact discussing tree nurseries and the transplantation of young shoots: “All of these [shoots] it is customary not to put in their own ground at once, but first to give them to a foster-mother and let them grow up in seed-plots, and then change their habitation again, this removal having a marvelously civilizing effect even on wild trees, whether it be the case that, like human beings, trees also have a nature that is greedy for novelty and travel, or whether on going away they leave their venom behind when the plant is torn up from the root, and like animals are tamed by handling.” (Pliny, Natural History, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard UP, 1997, vol. 5, book XVII: XI 67-68, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Dorléans, La plante humaine, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 55.
resembles what a naturalist might say on the variety of all things in nature. He states that, just as some parents have children with blond hair and others with black, and the same apple tree can produce red apples or white ones, the olive tree must have simply flowered differently. The gardener, however, explains the olive tree’s black flowers in an entirely different way—through a narration of its origins. He had in fact obtained a graft, “freschment coupée, et dont la droicture estoit belle et haute,”110 from a noble woman who had held the branch during a procession she attended in Genoa on Palm Sunday (“le jour des Rameaux”). Traveling back to Brabant, she brought it with her and gave it to the gardener. It was this olive branch, he explained to Dorléans, that “vous voyez si belle, mais parée de noir, au lieu que les autres ont leurs fleurs blanches. Vous cognoistrez par elle, combien vaut la transplantation.” Once again, Dorléans’s perspective is that of a naturalist or a botanist: the olive tree must have become altered because of its abscission and the time elapsed before it had been replanted. But his perspective then suddenly shifts from this semi-scientific hypothesis to one focused on the affective nature of plants:

Pour ce que la part où le cousteau avoit passé, il avoit alteré le bois, et gasté la moëlle et le suc du rameau, comme il se corrompt aux membres de l’homme, quand le glaive les a offensez. Car les plantes (luy dis-je lors) sentent leurs playes, et ont douleur, comme nous, et craignent que leur continuité ne vienne à se dissoudre par la violence du fer. Elles en pleurent et jetent gouttes ameres de leurs yeux, certains tesmoins de leur sentiment, et de la douleur qu’elles souffrent, comme fait la vigne en son incision, ou la myrrhe et l’encens qui pleurent en leurs blessures.111

110 Ibid., 56.

111 Dorléans, La plante humaine, 56-57.
Plants are described here anthropomorphically: they express sentiments, shed tears, feel their wounds, suffer pain, and worry about the preservation of their lineage. Should they be cut, they will blacken and rot like the severed members of the human body. Dorléans then goes on in this passage to draw a parallel between plants and humans, showing how they both experience the sufferings of exile. Returning to the topic of the transplanted olive tree, he suggests half-jokingly that perhaps it was now dressed in black because it was in mourning of the place it had lost:

Mais que diriez-vous (ce luy dis-je en riant) s’il s’habille de noir pour le deuil qu’il a de l’avoir tiré de son pays, et de son sol natal, et du lien où il avoit toutes ses connoissances et ses amitièz avec sa parenté ? Car ce ne sont pas fables, mais histoire vrayes et naturelles, que les plantes sont quelquesfois dolentes d’estre tirées du sol et du sein de leur pays naturel pour les transplanter ailleurs.112

Snatched away from its native soil and roots, the olive tree obviously serves here to underscore Dorléans’s own experience of exile and separation from France.113 He too had been like a branch transplanted abroad. Inserted as it was in a text dedicated to the memory of the dead king, the parallel between Dorléans’s exile and the grafted olive branch’s transplantation allowed him to underline one last time just how deep his trauma had been, and how this uprooting had perhaps been the most significant event of his life, one that had brought about his repentance, conversion, and acceptance of Henri IV. There is also the possibility of reading the black flowers of the grafted branch as a metaphor of the dark past of which he had been unable to rid himself, even after he had embraced the king. We only need look at the reference to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that Dorléans made at

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113 Tellingly, the notion of transplantation was present in Dorléans’s other texts. In a letter included in his *Œuvres posthumes*, he had explained his return from exile as a kind of replanting: “[…] on me replante en mon païs, où je retourne, pour jeter ma dernier feuille […]”
the end of the passage where he evoked the suffering of plants to convince ourselves that the question of repentance was here too very much present:

C’est le subject pourquoi le Poëte Ovide parlant de Myrrha, changée en l’arbre de myrrhe, dit ainsi:

Elle pleure sans cesse, et son escorce toute
Moitte d’humides pleurs distille goutte à goutte. 114

The story of Myrrha’s incestuous relationship with her father Cinyras appears in Book X of the *Metamorphoses*. Although Myrrha’s desire for her father had filled her with shame and remorse, she had been overcome by it and had tricked him into sleeping with her. Upon discovering her horrendous crime, her father had tried to kill her. Pregnant with their son, Adonis, she had fled into exile. After nine months of weary wandering, she had stopped in the Sabaean land and begged the Gods to give her the just punishment she deserved for her sins: “O gods, if any there be who will listen to my prayer, I do not refuse the dire punishment I have deserved; but lest, surviving, I offend the living, and dying, I offend the dead, drive me from both realms; change me and refuse me both life and death!” 115 The prayer of the penitent had been heard and she was turned into a Myrrh tree. The sap the tree sheds represents the tears of her shame and regret of her last offense: “Though she has lost her old-time feelings with her body, still she weeps, and the warm drops trickle down from the tree.” 116 Dorléans’s reference to this episode from Ovid is particularly interesting, for, to a certain extent, the part of the tale that concerns


116 Ibid., 99 (499-500).
Myrrha’s exile, repentance, and metamorphosis, resembles his own experiences. In both cases, exile had led to repentance and transformation. In the same way that Myrrha had metamorphosed into a tree, or the flowers of the grafted olive tree had turned black, Dorléans had changed. During his exile, he had been separated from his country—and his “father,” Henri IV—and this had ultimately led to his transformation. But repentance had failed to erase the past, which kept returning obsessively under his pen. Like Myrrha, he seemed destined to repent without end.

Unsurprisingly, La plante humaine revisits the question of the king’s clemency and forgiveness. In a way that is almost exactly the same as what we have seen with the Remerciement au roy, Dorléans reminds his readers and himself that Henri IV had always recognized him as a good man: “que je fusse tousjours homme de bien, comme j’avois tousjours esté.” This repetition is in fact performed at different levels within the text, since Dorléans notes that the judgment Henri IV had made of him had been reiterated (“il m’a reïtéré”) in front of a large crowd of important men at the Tuileries. And this time, Dorléans invites a new witness to testify—Marie de Medici, the queen herself: “Vous estes, Madame, un tesmoin affidé, de ce qu’il [Henri IV] me dit lors, tesmoin qui en vaut cent mille, et contre lequel, ny mes ennemis, ny mes envieux, n’ont et n’auront jamais aucun reproche […].” Obviously still unsettled by real or imagined attacks from his enemies eight years after his pardon, Dorléans seems here to be desperately clinging to a narrative that will “correct” the public perception of his political role. But it would be

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117 Dorléans, La plante humaine, 41.

118 Ibid., 42.
unfair to view this as just yet another attempt by an old Leaguer to defend his honor for posterity: if only for the fact of this constant rehashing, now extended over hundreds of pages, there is no doubt that this defense still falls in the category of penitential writing. Indeed, with what can only be described as a sort of masochistic complacency, Dorléans, by claiming his innocence, continues to make his past faults known to all, maintaining them, as it were, as a thing of the present. In that sense as well, his fate resembles Myrrha’s.

But maybe this last text, written a year after the king’s death, sought to achieve closure after all, for there are indications that Dorléans’s uses of a botanical metaphor—particularly in the story of the grafted olive branch—could be interpreted in another way. Indeed, it is significant that the setting in which he narrates this tale of transplantation is a *jardin des simples*, that is, a medicinal garden. Far from buying into Dorléans’s interpretation of the olive branch as mourning its exile, the gardener explains that in fact, plants love to be transplanted: “[…] il n’y a choses que les plantes ayment d’avantage que de changer de place et d’estre transplantées. […] le commun appetit des plantes, et s’il faut dire ainsi, la commune volupté, estoit de peregriner et d’estre transplantez en un autre sol, où ils se delectoient.”¹¹⁹ Dorléans—quite unexpectedly—accepts the gardener’s reading. Rather than understanding his “transplantation”—that is, his exile and repentance—only as loss, he now seems to see the good in it, because of what it has offered him—a spiritual conversion, the possibility of growth, a new beginning.¹²⁰


¹²⁰ Dorléans portrays his places of exile in a more positive light. They are like homely nests that have protected him during his travels: “[j’ai été] jeté au pays de Brabant, et dans Bruxelles, et Anvers, qui a esté le nid de ma peregrination.” (Ibid., 53) In fact, the switch from using the word “exile” to “peregrination” is
Transplantation makes plants better, more beautiful: “Madame, tous ceux qui ont escript curieusement, et veritablement de la nature des plantes, tiennent pour constant, que la transplantation des arbres les fait et plus beaux, et plus grands, et meilleurs qu’ils n’estoyent auparavant.” 121 Exile is no longer exile, but peregrination, and rather than representing a never-ending state of mourning, it is bringing about a new beginning. It is interesting to note that the motif of healing resurfaces in the text in a discussion about the curative property of plants, reminiscent, according to Dorléans, of Henri IV’s powers of political reconciliation. Just as an “excellent Chirurgien a des onguents et des cataplasmes” for all possible kinds of wounds, so do kings aid all those in suffering who require it (“ainsi les Rois peuvent donner soulagement à tous les affligez qui les requierent”122). And unlike merchants who peddle their products, monarchs do not sell their graces and gifts. Rather they graciously give them to those in need or who seem to be worthy of receiving them: “Mais les Rois peuvent, non pas vendre, car ils ne sont pas Marchands, mais debiter les graces, et les dons qu’ils ont en toute la circonference de leur Estat, pour en accommoder ceux de leurs subjects qui les en requierent, ou qui leur semblent dignes de les posseder.”123 Such graces and gifts are like curative balms on subjects torn by discord, and a country rent by years of civil war:

also significant—the former suggests he was forced away from his home and the latter that it was pleasurable and for reasons of traveling.

121 Ibid., 52-53.

122 Ibid., 283-284.

123 Dorléans, La plante humaine, 284.
Le baume a cela, qu’il renforce les membres lassez, et les soulage. Et les Athletes de la Grece, pour ce subject en estoient toujours garnis, tant pour leur playes et contusion, que pour subvenir à l’entretenement des forces de leurs corps. Car s’il y a fraction, s’il y a dissolution, s’il y a contusion, c’est le baume qui le guerit. J’ay esprouvé, que s’il y a un subject separé de sa patrie, et de sa patrie, et de sa femme, et de ses enfans, et de ses parens et amis, c’est un Roy, qui comme un baume de gracieuse odeur, peut reùnir ceste chair avec sa chair, et avec un peu de baume de douceur, faire que ce est separé, se reprenne.124

Henri IV heals what has been fractured, bruised, and broken. Not only has he personally united Dorléans with his family and friends, eased his pain, and given him new life, but he has also healed many of the ills plaguing France: “[il est] un baume, dont la vertu avoit remedié à tant de maux et si divers […].”125 Dorléans sees solace in the king’s “douceur” and his forgiveness, which have united his flesh with the king’s (“cesté chair avec sa chair”) and mended the nation.

There is a tension at work in La plante humaine between two different understandings of repentance. On the one hand, Dorléans seems to be struggling with a never-ending process of penance. His faults remain present; he is ceaselessly reminding himself of his past. Even insisting on his moral integrity brings back the idea of fault and sin. On the other hand, he also seems to be seeking a form of repentance that will ultimately lead to closure and reconciliation. There is a desire in La Plante Humaine to finally mark the limits of penance and to move past old traumas toward the possibility of a new beginning. This tension between two different understandings is not something only specific to Dorléans’s repentance—it is also symptomatic of a wider, more important political shift. With Henri III, as we have seen, repentance had been

124 Ibid., 284.

125 Ibid., 300.
transformed into a style of governance that was endlessly mobilized in the public sphere (see chapters one and two). As a concept, it had pervaded politics and left its mark on the thinking of Ultra-Catholics. In spite of his criticisms of the Valois king’s reign, Dorléans, like many Leaguers, had absorbed penitential politics into his own practices and rhetoric, and kept doing so even years after the king’s death. As we know, repentance had been a recurrent theme in *Le Banquet et aprèsdisnée du conte d’Arete*, a text in which Dorléans focused on Henri IV’s conversion. There had also been a general intensification of discourses politicizing penance, with a peak during the interregnum years. After Henri IV’s rise to power, a shift occurred in Dorléans’s views on repentance—one that was connected to his conversion and to the new politics of repentance emerging at the time. While he had at first chosen exile rather than to betray his religious and political allegiances, Dorléans, as the years went by, progressively went through a transformation and started using the discourse of repentance on himself. But this shift did not happen in a vacuum. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, it mirrored the politics of Henri IV and of Royalists, who were calling for the repentance of Leaguers. But another major change to occur in the conceptualization and practice of repentance was the return to a more traditional form of Catholic penance, one based on a cyclical model in which the sinner has to pass through a series of stages in order to properly complete the process. Understanding himself as a sinner, the penitent would experience contrition, confess his faults, undergo absolution, and then perform works of satisfaction. It was only after fulfilling these requirements that he would be forgiven and that he could be said to have attained a state of grace—one that allowed him to reach some kind of closure. Although this state of grace could never last long, since the individual would inevitably fall back
into sin—moving once again from “grace to sin, from sin to confession and absolution, and thus back to grace again”\textsuperscript{126}—this was part of the traditional process of penance. Dorléans’s later focus on reconciliation and forgiveness seems to be at least somewhat related to this shift towards a more traditional model of penance. It appears as if he were imagining an end to repentance.

This shift in focus also resonates very strongly with the politics of repentance more generally advocated by Henri IV. After his own conversion and \textit{sacre}, in a bid to bring a real and definitive end to the Holy League Wars, the king had sought to emphasize one aspect of penance above all others: forgiveness. The legend surrounding his acts of clemency and his magnanimity is revealing of this politicization of forgiveness which was effective in helping him restore national and religious unity in France. The fact that Dorléans was also writing about these topics is not coincidental. Following the Edict of Nantes and the Franco-Spanish Wars, he was influenced—like many writers during this period—by the huge influx of texts promoting peace and forgiveness.

If Dorléans is threading the limits between these two different understandings of repentance—one seemingly never-ending and the other bringing closure—what prevails in \textit{La Plante humaine} is his desire to reach the end stage of penance, a liberation from the past. However, what is most striking about his search for reconciliation is where it ultimately led him—to a discourse on absolute obedience. Indeed nothing short of astonishing to anyone familiar with Dorléans’s early works is this progressive shift from a discourse on repentance to one on obedience, as if, in the end, one concept could not

have been thought of without the other, as if penance had always been meant to dissolve itself into complete submission to monarchical authority.

One of the most interesting surprises of *La Plante Humaine* is the way in which Dorléans uses the botanical metaphor to espouse a new model of absolutism for the rest of France. Henri IV is a “*plante humaine,*” no longer depicted as having only the two bodies so famously defined by Ernst Kantorowicz—that is to say, as having both a *body natural,* which is human, carnal, subjected to passions, the passage of time, disease, death, and a *body immortal,* which is representative of the body politic or the “*corps mystique*”—but as now being a corporate entity *fused* with nature. The king is one with the natural world, human and plant, and in this transformation of the old body politic metaphor into a botanical metaphor, the very *boundaries* of the political are being redefined. Henri IV’s power has expanded. He is a tree whose branches extend out over everyone and all:

> La terre ne soustenoit rien de plus grand qu’estoit ce Prince [Henri IV] entre les Princes, sa racine estoit si ferme, et si bien appuyée, sa domination si bien fondée, et si advantageusement approfondie pour soustenir son coupeau, ses branches si largement espadnues par le monde, ses alliances si diffuses, ses intelligences si dilatées, et ses conféderations si estendues avec tous ses voisins. Il y avoit tant de peuples couvertes de sa protection, tant d’oiseaux haut et sublimes, nichez dedans ses rameaux, et tant de gens et de pensionnaires qui vivoyent sous luy, qu’on ne vid onc une pareille Royauté.\(^\text{127}\)

Protector of all peoples, the living nexus of all relations, Henri IV is here, we might say, arborescing. His plant/human body extends out over the earth in all directions, incorporating and absorbing the world in a kind of encyclopedic way, bringing together histories, politics, and nature. This is the new metaphor for the model of absolutism that

\(^{127}\) Dorléans, *La plante humaine*, 329.
Dorléans is both witnessing and imagining. The king is both plant and human, terrestrial and divine: he is the trunk of a tree that holds together a fragilized France made up of many divided branches (Protestants, Catholics, Leaguers, Politiques, Royalists). He serves as the connecting force that allows these differing shoots to coexist, bringing unity to them. He has officiated the return of accord and harmony after the religious and civil troubles of the Wars of Religion, producing the flowers and fruits of reconciliation. But he is also the tree that orders all others communities. The model of absolutism proposed here is not the homogeneous one that will later emerge in Louis XIV’s France—that of “la France toute Catholique.” Unlike the sun king’s leveling light that crushes or scorches those whose religious beliefs differ from his own, this earlier model of absolutism tells a story of hybridity and connectedness. It is an arborescent power, with branches dividing, forking, and extending out, but also held together by the steady trunk of the state: “Prenez, Madame, que c’est le tombeau du grand Pan, et notre toat, puisque tout un Estat gist en la teste du Roy. Je luy ay donné les honneurs des forests, puisque Pan habitoit les forests […]”

Reigning over man like a natural deity, Henri IV has reached a degree of sovereignty that seems all encompassing, universal. There can no longer be opposition, or an inside and an outside. Roots and branches reach everywhere. If this representation of the new political model brought forth with Henri IV is striking, it is because it shows the way in which Dorléans’s vision has been transformed: the injunction to repent and obey that Royalists had promoted earlier in the period is now fully internalized. The ex-Leaguer adheres to this model to such an extent that he is now proposing his own metaphor of absolute domination and absolute obedience. To be sure,

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this metaphor of the healing tree—which represents the foundation of a new political space, one that is protected, calm, harmonious—resonates with the politics of reconciliation promoted by the Royalists at the turn of the century. Dorléans now seems to understand that one must quickly move past repentance, perhaps even efface it, in the name of monarchical submission. Rather than incorporating repentance more intimately into the process of reconciliation, it must be evacuated so as to not disturb the so-called status quo, so as to maintain social cohesion and harmony. Curiously, at the same time as he is staging this shift towards obedience for himself, with the king represented as an all-reaching, hospitable and protective tree, Dorléans is still haunted by a discourse on repentance. It appears in his text as if it were under erasure, not entirely gone, present in its absence, an empty space ready to be filled again now that the king is dead.
Conclusion

“Repentance: to think about sin without making the thought of consolation.”¹ (Iris Murdoch, *The Bell*)

“[It is] political to rob hatred of its perpetuity.”² (Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*)

After pardoning Leaguers who had pledged their allegiance to him, Henri IV was accused by some Royalists of having shown excessive clemency towards his enemies. The arguments he provided in response to their anger are interesting because they are symptomatic of the much larger stakes at work in his politics of forgiveness and explain in part the effect they would have on the future:

Ce que lui aiant esté remonstré, et que la trop grande clemence dont il usoit envers ses ennemis et ce peuple ligueur, offensoit ses bons subjets et serviteurs et lui portoit prejudice, il fist à ceux qui lui en parloient la response suivante, en ces mots, digne d’un Roy et prince vraiment chrestien: “Si vous et tous ceux qui tenés ce langage, disiés, tous les jours vostre patenostre de bon cœur, vous ne diriés pas ce que vous me dites. […] comme il [Dieu] me pardonne, aussi veux-je pardonner, et en oubliant les fautes de mon peuple, estre encore plus clement et ce


Henri IV is here reinforcing the Christian doctrine on forgiveness above all else. Those who desired to punish Leaguers, who nurtured their anger, rancor, or any other form of animosity towards them were not displaying a proper Christian attitude. A “truly” pious individual would have known that it was now time to forgive and forget. If the king had been able to remit his enemies’ faults, so should they. What becomes apparent in a passage like this one, when it is read in light of what we have already seen, is that the injunction to forgive was becoming a political and religious obligation. Everyone was to follow the king’s exemplarity of mercifulness so that France could move towards peace. The fact that he had passed several legislative acts to enforce it shows just how serious Henri IV was when he declared that all enemies should be forgiven. With the publication of the Edict of Nantes in 1598 and the Peace of Vervins, which ended the Franco-Spanish wars and announced a general pardon, Henri IV forbid his subjects to discuss past violence, in fear that such references to the wars would impede his politics of forgiveness and reconciliation:

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. [...]

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All of the troubles that had occurred after the rise of the Holy League and the premature death of Francis, duke of Anjou, which had left Henri de Navarre as heir-presumptive to the throne, were to be forgotten as well as those preceding it.\textsuperscript{5} Their memory was to remain “extinguished” and “asleep” (“assoupie”) as if nothing had ever happened (“comme de chose non advenue”). The Edict of Nantes’s second article extended this intentional overlooking of past offenses by listing and specifying the kinds of references that were forbidden:

Défendons à tous nos sujets, de quelque état et qualité qu’ils soient, d’en renouveler la mémoire, s’attaquer, ressentir, injurier, ni provoquer l’un l’autre par reproche de ce qui s’est passé, pour quelque cause et prétexte que ce soit, en disputer, contester, quereller ni s’outrager ou s’offenser de fait ou de parole, mais se contenir et vivre paisiblement ensemble comme frères, amis et concitoyens, sur peine aux contrevenants d’être punis comme infracteurs de paix et perturbateurs du repos public.\textsuperscript{6}

Attacking, disputing, contesting, quarrelling, insulting or reproaching one another for something that had happened in the past—all acts or emotional outbursts of this sort were entirely forbidden, no matter what the cause or pretext. The erection of rabble-rousing monuments, the writing of incendiary pamphlets and provocative books, and anything else that might reignite past tensions were equally prohibited. Indeed, already in 1594, Leaguers’ books had been banned and burned in public squares.\textsuperscript{7} For the sake of restoring

\textsuperscript{5} For more on the history of the Edict of Nantes, see: L’édit de Nantes, pres. & annot. by Janine Garrison, (Biarritz: Atlantica, 1997); Bernard Cottret, L’édit de Nantes: Pour en finir avec les guerres de religion (Paris: Perrin, 1997).

\textsuperscript{6} L’édit de Nantes, pres. & annot. by Janine Garrison, 27.

order and maintaining peace, the old Roman law of *oubliance* had to be implemented:

“*optima belli civilis defensio oblivio est.*”

Censorship was undoubtedly a crucial technique in Henri IV’s politics of forgiveness, and it had a great impact on the fate of the concept of repentance at the turn of the century: forgetting past violence more or less meant that penance could no longer play a real role in the process of reconciliation. This quasi-disappearance was of course problematic. For one thing, how could a true process of reconciliation be achieved, if past wrongs were simply silenced and effaced as if they had never happened? It is clear that the Edict of Nantes as well as the other laws of “*oubliance*” that had already been present in almost all of the edicts since the Edict of Amboise of 1563, but never truly implemented until this point, were meant to deprive the concept of repentance of its past political currency. But this erasure could not be imposed without potentially far-reaching consequences. Because in the minds of many, repentance would have traditionally preceded forgiveness, it was as if a crucial step in the process of reconciliation had been omitted. In Henri IV’s politics, forgiving and forgetting meant evacuating repentance from the practice of forgiveness. Hence, if collective scenes of acknowledgment of past faults, or public moments of remorse and repentance for having wronged others on either side of the conflict possibly took place, they would have been extremely marginal. In fact, even some traditional religious rites of penance were partly censured around the time of the Edict of Nantes: because their mortification was seen not only as a source of

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8 “The best defense of civil war is oblivion.” See Antoine Loisel, *De l'Amnestie ou oubliance des maux faits et reçus pendant les troubles, et à l'occasion d'iceux, remonstrance faite en la ville d'Agen, à l'ouverture de la Cour de justice [par A. Loisel]*, (Paris: A. L'Angelier, 1595), 2.
renewed tensions between Catholics and Protestants, but also as too reminiscent of the politics of the previous reign, flagellants were for example barred from taking part in penitential processions held in Montpellier at that time.\(^9\)

If the end of the Franco-Spanish Wars led Henri IV’s monarchy to stage a series of celebrations which included commemorative rituals, bonfires, public festivals, and military parades celebrating the new peace, a certain number of Leaguers, Royalists, and Protestants were not as happy with this reconciliation as Royalist propaganda had led the public to believe. One reason for their discontent was the lack of repentance on the part of those who had committed crimes against them during Henri IV’s reign. Along with the Royalists who thought that Leaguers should repent and be punished for their past actions, many Protestants who held legitimate doubts about whether or not the Edict of Nantes would provide them with lasting protection, were convinced that Catholics saw the laws of oubliance as a convenient exemption from making further compromises or for taking any responsibility for past horrors. The Huguenot soldier, poet, and historian Agrippa d’Aubigné, was one of those who would go on to openly denounce the past wrongs perpetrated against Reformers in texts like *Les Tragiques*, *La Confession de Sancy*, or *Discours par stances avec l’esprit du feu Roy Henry Quatriesme*. Not only had he felt betrayed when Henri IV abjured Protestantism, which he took as both a personal affront and a religious one, but he also overtly expressed resentment and even his desire for vengeance in the face of such censorship. Intransigent, he refused to resign himself to the Edict of Nantes, and up until the end of his life, he communicated his deep

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disillusionment before what he considered to be a defeat for his party.\textsuperscript{10} Even after the monarch’s death, he would describe Henri IV’s peace “\textit{non paix mais paction d’une ruineuse servitude},”\textsuperscript{11} an idea that is also present in his \textit{Confession de Sancy}. Relentless in his efforts to refute and reframe the accusations made against Reformers, as well as to condemn the atrocities of the Holy League, D’Aubigné refused to be silenced. For him, in many ways, Catholics seemed to have never properly repented or been punished for their crimes. The question that haunts the poet seems to be whether or not reconciliation can indeed take place if repentance and punishment are absent. Hanna Arendt’s phrase comes to mind here: “\textit{Le châtiment a ceci de commun avec le pardon qu’il tente de mettre un terme à une chose qui, sans intervention, pourrait continuer indéfiniment. Il est donc très significatif, c’est un élément structurel du domaine des affaires humaines, que les hommes soient incapables de pardonner ce qu’ils ne peuvent punir, et qu’ils soient incapables de punir ce qui se révèle impardonnable.}”\textsuperscript{12} If, for D’Aubigné, there was something artificial about the collective forgiving and forgetting that the king was imposing, which left him bitter and inconsolable until the end of his life, this was perhaps because the “common accord” put forth by the king had neglected to take into account that forgiveness is not forgiveness without repentance.


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Houël, Nicolas. *Advertissement et déclaration de l'institution de la maison de la Charité chrestienne establie ès faux-bourgs Sainct Marcel, par l'autorité du roy et sa court de parlement, 1578 ; ensemble plusieurs sainctes exhortations, instructions et enseignemens tant en prose qu'en vers pour induire le chrestien à aimer Dieu et les pauvres, le tout recueilly des Sainctes Escritures et authoritez des saincts docteurs de l'Église catholique, par Nicolas Houël,...* Paris: P. Chevillot, 1580.  
———. *Recueil. Dessins de Nicolas Houel, représentant une Procession de la Ligue en
1585 (les Pénitents blancs, les Chevaliers du Saint-Esprit et Henri III défilent)


L’athéisme de Henry de Valois où est monstré le vray but de ses dissimulations et cruautez. Paris: Pierre Deshayes, 1589.

La Vie et innocence des deux freres, contenant un ample discours, par lequel l’on pourra aysement rembarrer ceux qui taschent à estaindre leur renom. Paris: Antoine du Brueil, 1589.


Les Statuts de la reigle de l’Oratoire et compagnie du benoist Sainct François, instituez par Henry troisièsme,... en l'honneur de Dieu, & du benoist Sainct François.


Lettre d'un ecclesiastique à un sien seigneur et amy, sur les difficultez que les ecclesiastiques d'Angiers et autres ligueurs font de prester serment de fidelité au roy Henry III. Tours: Claude de Mon'troeil et Jean Richer, 1589.


La ligue tres-sainte, tres-Chrestienne, et tres-Catholique. n.p.: n.p., 1585.


La Consolation de tous fidelles Catholiques, qui sont affligez & persecutez par la
tyrannie des ennemis de la Religion Catholicque Apostolique, & Romaine.
Ensemble le seul moyen de resister aux ennemis de la religion Catholique, est la
continuation des prieres & processions qui se font tant de jour que de nuit dans
la ville de Paris, que autres villes Catholiques du Royaume de France. Paris: pour
Gilles de S. Gilles, demeurant ruë du bon Puis Puis à l'enseigne des Grassieux près la
porte S. Victor, 1589.
La double tragédie du Duc et Cardinal de Guyse jouée à Bloys le 23 et 24 Décembre
dernier, envoyée à Mgr. le Duc du Mayne et autres Princes catholiques, qui
La grande prophétie... Regis filius persis Abbatis Cambrisensis. Il y a neuf cens ans que
la présente a esté prophetisee & qui ne doit plus durer que jusques en l'an mil
cinq cens quatre vingt huit & quatre vingt neuf. Traduite de Latin, en François,
laquelle declare choses merveilleuses a l'advenir en brief de temps, laquelle ne fut
La Harangue prononcée à Henry de Valois par un marchand de la ville de Tours, le 12
La ligue tres-sainte, tres-Chrestienne, et tres-Catholique. n.p.: n.p., 1585.
La Mothe, Jean de. Le Reveil-Matin et mot du guet des bons catholiques, enfans de
l'Eglise, apostolique et romaine, unique espouse de Jésus Christ... Douay:
Jerome Bourcier, 1591.
La Nullité de la pretendue innocence et justification des massacres commis par Henry de
Valois, au contraire de son artificielle déclaration envoyée par les villes de
Les propos lamentables de Henry de Valois, tirez de sa confession, par un remords de
La Recompense qu'a receu Henry de Valois d'avoir creu et hanté son amy Jean
L’athéisme de Henry de Valois où est monstré le vray but de ses dissimulations et
Le Bloy, Jean. L’effroyable esclat de l’anathème, et les merveilleux effets d’iceluy. En ce
petit discours utile à tous estats, on voit les maledictions, inconvénients, maux,
malheurs & désastre que la censure de l’escomunie nous apporte: ce qui est fort
conforme à la bulle de nostre S. pere le Pape, envoyée ces jours passez du S.
siege apostolique en ce royaume. Paris: Denis Cotinet devant la Cour de Baviere,
1589.
Les Choses horribles, contenues en une lettre envoyée à Henry de Valois, par un Enfant
Le [sic] Connivences de Henry de Valois avec Monsieur de Charouges gouverneur de la
ville de Rouen, ensemble comme elle a esté reduite à l’Union par les catholiques
Les considerations sur le meurdre commis en la personne de feu Monsieur le Duc de
Les Derniers propos de Henry de Valois, jadis Roy, et tyran de France, recueilly par le
Le Discours au vray, sur la mort et trespas de Henry de Valois, lequel est decedé le 2
jour de ce present moi d’aoust 1589. Paris: Pour François Tabart, 1589.


Le remerciment des catholiques unis, faict à la Declaration & Protestation de Henry de Bourbon, dict Roy de Navarre. Lyon: Jean Pillehotte, prins sur la coppie imprimée à Paris, 1589.


Les sorceleries de Henry de Valois et les oblations qu’il faisoit au diable dans le bois de Vincennes, avec la figure des démons d’argent doré ausquels il faisoit offande et lesquels se voyent encore en ceste ville. Paris: Jouxte. La copie de Didier Millot, 1589.


Les Traces admirables jugemens de Dieu remarqués en la mort et fin miserable de Henri


Le Tombeau du Roy, avec les pleurs et lamentations de sa mort... Caen: de l'imprimerie de Jean de Flure, 1589.


Le Vray Catholique Romain Contre Le Ligueur Couvert. Où Il Est Monstré Que Nous Devons Tous Prier Dieu de Faire Bien Tost Nostre Roy Catholique, Mais que le discours imprimé sur ce subject sous le titre de supplication, est un artifice de la Ligue et de ses pensionnaires, pour nous diviser, et consequemment perdre. n.p.: n.p., 1591.

Le vray discours des grandes processions qui se font depuis les frontières d'Allemagne jusques à la France, dont jamais n'en fut faicte de semblable, & comme plus amplement vous sera monstré dans le discours. Paris: n.p., 1583.


L’Orme, Philibert De. Architecture de Philibert de L’Orme... Oeuvre entière, contenant onze livres augmentée de deux, et autres figures non vues, tant pour desseins qu’ornemens de maisons, avec une belle invention pour bien bastir et à petits
fraiz... Paris: R. Chaudière, 1626.
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Mandement pour le reglement des processions et prières publique pour chacun jour de la sepmaine, durant ce saint temps de Karesme, afin que par les prières... des gens de bien nous puissions avoir victoire sur noz ennemis, et pour la délivrance des princes catholiques. Paris: J. Guérin, 1589.
———. Metamorphose d'Henry de Bourbon jadis roy de Navarre, faussement et iniquement pretendant d'estre Roy de France [...] Ensemble la Bulle de nostre S. Pere le Pape Sixte V. Lyon: J. Pillehotte, 1589.
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*Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans: avec les Chevaliers du St. Espir, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.* n.p.: n.p., n.d.


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Response a la supplication, contre celuy lequel faisant semblant de donner avis au Roy de se faire Catholic, veult exciter ses bons subjects à rebellion. n.p.: n.p., 1591.

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**Figure 1: White Penitents from the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame (circa 1583)**

Pierre de L’Estoile, *Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue*

The penitents are wearing a fully hooded white Holland sackcloth covering their face and leaving only two slits for the eyes.
Figure 2: Penitents from the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame (circa 1583)

Pierre de L’Estoile, Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue
Figure 3: Penitents from the Congrégation des Pénitents de l’Annonciation de Notre-Dame (1583)

Christophe de Penfeuneniou Cheffontaine, Apologie de la confrairie des pénitents, erigée et instituée en la ville de Paris, par le treschrestien roy de France, & de Pollogne, troisieme de son nom (Paris: Michel Julian, au mont S. Hilaire, à l’Estoille Couronnée, 1583)
Figure 4: The Adoubement of a knight from the *Ordre du Saint-Esprit*


Henri III is sitting on his throne as a knight is being dubbed into the chivalric Order of the Holy Spirit at his feet.
Figure 5: Henri III presiding over the first ceremony of the Order of the Holy Spirit (1587)

Illumination by Guillaume Richardière (Chantilly, Musée Condé)
Figure 6: The Wedding Ball of the Duke of Joyeuse (1581-1582)
(École française, musée du Louvre)

The wedding ball given on September 24, 1581 at the Louvre by Henri III and Catherine de Medici for the marriage of Anne de Joyeuse and Marguerite de Lorraine-Vaudémont.
Figure 7: The Blue Penitents (circa 1583)

Pierre de L’Estoile, *Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue*
Figure 8: Saint Jerome leading the *Confrérie des Pénitents Bleus de Saint Jérôme* (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans: avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)

Walking behind the knights from the order of the St. Esprit, St Jerome and his followers are each holding stones with which to beat their breast: this was one of the attributes of St. Jerome’s penance and refers to the moment when he prayed, fasted, and beat his chest in the desert to still his sexual desires.
Figure 8: Mary Madeleine, St Mary of Egypt, and the *Filles pénitentes* (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)
Figure 9: The Order of Minims (circa 1582)

“The Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)

The Minims are in the middle of the sketch. The knights of the Ordre du Saint-Esprit, who are carrying tapers, precede and follow them. A Capuchin in the foreground to the far right, recognizable by his pointy hood, holds a large cross. He is followed by other Capuchins, who are visible in the sketch of the Henri III and Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont (see figure 12).
Figure 10: Saint John the Baptist, the Prophets, and (possibly?) the Feuillants (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)
“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)

A group of Capuchins, recognizable by their pointy hoods, are in the left foreground. The Knights from the Order of the St. Esprit carrying tapers follow them and are succeeded by a bearded man, most likely the penitent Job, who hoists the crucifix above him. The cross has a skeleton nailed onto it. Jonah is between Henri III and Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, who are both wearing a crown and a sackcloth (although their faces are not hidden in this depiction). In this sketch, Henri III symbolically represents the King of Nineveh who leads his people to penance. The prophet, another key figure associated with this biblical story, holds the symbolic ship from which he was cast out. The whale is wrapped around it. As Francis Yates notes, it is extremely unusual that Jonah should hold the whale in this way. It is conceivable that this may also be a dolphin wrapped around the ship, and that Jonah is uttering a prophecy concerning the advent of a Dauphin since the king also prayed for a heir during many of his processions.
Figure 12: The Story of Jonah (1562-1583)

Histoire de Jonas (Engraving, BNF)

This is another representation of the king of Nineveh depicted during the period. In the right foreground next to Jonas, we see the Ninevite king holding a book (the bible?) and kneeling in prayer. His people, who surround him, are also repenting.
Figure 13: The Works of Mercy or Satisfaction (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)
Figure 14: The Works of Mercy or Satisfaction (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)
Figure 15: The Works of Mercy or Satisfaction (circa 1582)

“Procession de Henri III, Roy de France et de Pologne, dite des Pénitens et des Flagellans : avec les Chevaliers du St. Esprit, de la première création, marchant trois à trois; et partant du Louvre pour se rendre aux grands Augustins; longeant les quais du Louvre, le Pont aux Meuniers, dit aujourd’hui le Pont de Change, et le Pont St. Michel, en 1579, le 1er janvier.” (Cabinet des Estampes, BNF, Pd. 29 Réserve)
Figure 1: The Effigies of the Duke of Guise and the Cardinal of Lorraine

Pierre de L’Estoile, *Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue*

The duke and the Cardinal are lying on a funeral bed, hands clasped together. Their insignia and coat of arms are displayed above them. Note that the Jerusalem cross, which is usually yellow, is black here as a sign of mourning. Their bodies are at the feet of the crucified Christ. Four tapers, a curtain of tears, and other symbols of the Passion surround them.
Figure 2: The Assassination of the Duke of Guise

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Figure 3: The Execution of the Cardinal of Lorraine

Figure 4: Procession of Leaguers

(BNF, n.d.)
Figure 5: Procession of Leaguers (1590 or 1593)

*Procession de la Ligue, sortant de l’arcade Saint-Jean de l’Hôtel de Ville*
(Paris, Musée Carnavalet)
Figure 6: The Assassination of Henri III

*L’assassinat de Henri III, la mort et les funérailles du Roy; l’arrestation de Jacques Clément* (Engraving, BNF, n.d.)
Figure 7: Les Articles du Dernier Testament de Henry de Valois, ou ceux qui tiennent pour le jour’hui le party contraire de la Saincte Union, sont bien et deuement salariez chacun selon leurs merites

Pierre de L’Estoile, Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue
Figure 8: La Sorcellerie de Jean D’Espernon, avec lamentations d’iceluy, et du Roy de Navarre sur la mort de Henry de Valois (1589)

Pierre de L’Estoile, Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue
Figure 9: Le Faux Mufle descouvert du grand hypocrite de la France, contenant les faicts plus memorables par luy exercez envers les Catholiques en ces derniers temps (1589)

Pierre de L’Estoile, Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue
Figure 10: *L’hermitage préparé pour Henry de Valois* (1589)

Pierre de L’Estoile, *Les Belles figures et Drolleries de la Ligue*
Figure 1: The Surrender of Paris. Henri IV rides into Paris.