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Devoted Politics: Jesuits and Elite Catholic Women at the Later Sixteenth-century Valois Court

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Abstract

This essay analyses how elite women at the sixteenth-century French court interacted with the Jesuits, in the context of the spiritual and political ambitions of all participants. Focusing particularly on the dynamic relationship between Catherine de Medici and the Jesuits, contextualized by the experiences of other elite women and men, it explores the period from the 1560s to the end of the 1580s during which Catherine occupied a powerful role and when individual members of the Society of Jesus rose to prominence at the court. To date, the scholarship of elite Catholic politics in which the Jesuits were involved has prioritized the activities of France's monarchs, Charles IX and Henri III, and its leading men in dynasties such as the Gonzaga-Nevers and Guise. Re-reading many of the same sources with an eye to the contribution and activities of women offers the potential for a broader narrative.

Keywords

women – patronage – devotion – confraternities – processions – religious wars – politics – ultra-Catholic League – France – Valois

A series of studies has examined the role of female patrons in the early establishment of the Society of Jesus across Europe. These works have shown that elite women, as well as their male counterparts, were initially targeted by Jesuits as patrons of the emerging religious movement and that they responded with enthusiasm and financial support.¹ However, Olwen Hufton, Maria Ann

1 Gabriella Zarri, "Il carteggio tra Don Leone Bartolini e un gruppo di gentildonne bolognesi negli anni del Concilio di Trento 1543–1563," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 7 (1986):

Conelli and Sheila ffolliott have observed that the Jesuits gradually turned away from visible recognition of female donors' contributions to the buildings and artworks that they helped to create, and focused their attention instead on powerful men.² Because of their invisibility in Jesuit material remains, we must reconstruct the role of female supporters through textual sources. Here, we find evidence that female involvement with the Jesuits was not limited to artistic and architectural patronage. In France, for example, interactions with elite women embroiled Jesuits in the high politics and devotional aspirations of those at the very heart of the Valois court.

Relations between Jesuits and elite Catholic women at the sixteenth-century French court have not been the focus of attention to date. This essay explores how women at court interacted with the Jesuits and with what degree of success for the spiritual and political ambitions of all concerned. It focuses particularly on the dynamic relationship between Catherine de Medici (1519–1589) and the Jesuits, complemented and contextualized by further analysis of the experiences of other elite women and men at court.³ This reveals the Jesuits' fluid connections during the later sixteenth century, which owed much to particular personalities within the Society and at court. This study explores the period from the 1560s to the end of the 1580s, during which time Catherine occupied a powerful role as the queen mother, governor, regent, and indeed as a patron, and when individual members of the Society of Jesus rose to prominence at the court.⁴ To date, the scholarship on Jesuit involvement in elite

1–550; Carolyn Valone, "Piety and Patronage: Women and the Early Jesuits," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 157–65.

- 2 Olwen Hufton, "Altruism and Reciprocity: The Early Jesuits and their Female Patrons," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 3 (2001): 328–53; Maria Ann Conelli, "A Typical Patron of Extraordinary Means: Isabella Feltria della Rovere and the Society of Jesus," *Renaissance Studies* 18, no. 3 (2004): 412–36; Sheila ffolliott, "European Women Patrons of Art and Architecture, c. 1500–1650: Some Patterns," *Renaissanceforum* 4 (2008), 1–18, here 5. http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/4_2008/ffolliott.pdf [Accessed July 10, 2015].
- 3 On the rise of the figure of the female *dévotés* at the end of the Wars of Religion and into the seventeenth century, see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and the Church in Seventeenth-century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) and Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 4 On Catherine's patronage of the arts more broadly, see Kathleen Chevalier-Wilson, ed. (with the collaboration of Eugénie Pascal), *Patronnes et mécènes en France à la Renaissance* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2007) and articles by Sheila ffolliott, Henri Zerner, Luisa Capodiceci, and Iain Fenlon in *Artful Allies, Medici Women as Cultural Mediators (1533–1743)*, ed. Christina Strunck (Milan: Silvana, 2011), 17–37, 39–45, 47–71, and

Catholic politics has prioritized the activities of France's monarchs, Charles IX (1550–1574) and Henri III (1551–1589), and the leading men in dynasties such as the Gonzaga-Nevers and Guise.⁵ Re-reading many of the same sources with an eye to the contribution and activities of women allows the construction of a different and broader narrative.

When it has been considered, Catherine's own relationship with the Jesuits has been understood at two polar opposites. For some scholars, her support for the new spiritual movement is suggested by the Society's legal acceptance in France in 1562, immediately following the Colloquy of Poissy that she organized.⁶ However, this limited acceptance in France owed far more to the enthusiasm of the young kings, François II (1544–1560) and Charles IX, and the encouragement of Guise relatives and advisors, than to the woman who arranged the colloque (intended to serve as the meeting place for compromise between Catholic and Huguenots).⁷ Other historians, such as Robert Knecht, have noted Catherine's concerns about her sons' relationships with Jesuits, specifically the charismatic preacher Émond Auger (1530–1591).⁸ Knecht cites Catherine's 1573 letter to her son Henri, then duke of Anjou, in which she warned him: "be on your guard with Master Aymont." Catherine's reasons for composing this letter are the focus of the first section.

"Be on Your Guard with Master Aymont": Distrust and Devotion

To understand Catherine's warning to her son, we must explore the man towards whom her fears were directed, Émond Auger. The charismatic Jesuit,

73–87; Margriet Hoogvliet, "Princely Culture and Catherine de Médicis," in *Princes and Princely Culture: 1450–1650*, ed. Martin Gosman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 103–30.

5 See the recent studies of Stuart Carroll, *Noble Power During the French Wars of Religion: the Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: The Guise Family and the Making of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Ariane Boltanski, *Les ducs de Nevers et l'état royal: Genèse d'un compromis (ca 1550–ca 1600)* (Geneva: Droz, 2006); A. Lynn Martin, *Henri III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973); Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

6 See, for example, John Lewis, *Adrien Turnèbe: (1512–1565): A Humanist Observed* (Geneva: Droz, 1998) who lists Catherine with the cardinals de Bourbon, de Lorraine, d'Armagnac, and de Tournon, as giving "powerful and combined support" in 1561 to the establishment of the Jesuits in France. See *ibid.*, 84.

7 Martin, *Henri III*, 26.

8 Robert J. Knecht, *Catherine de' Medici* (Abingdon: Pearson, 1998), 167. See also for this view, Jean Héritier, *Catherine de Medici*, trans. Charlotte Haldane (London: St Martin's Press, 1963).

who had been singled out for training by none other than Ignatius of Loyola (c. 1491–1556), had distinguished himself in pulpits, positions, and publications across the south of France. In 1563, Auger created the first Tridentine catechism in French, published at Lyon, his *Catéchisme et sommaire de la religion chrestienne*. Appointed provincial of Aquitaine in 1565, Auger then published a series of polemical and devotional works.⁹ Auger was making his mark for the Jesuits and attracted the attention of Charles, cardinal of Lorraine (1524–1574), leader of the extreme Catholic party, who supported the Jesuit's appearance at the royal court for Lent of 1568.

Auger's potent speech, however, was at odds with the current politics of Charles IX and Catherine, who were then deeply involved in negotiating what would become the Peace of Longjumeau with the Huguenots (published in March 1568).¹⁰ Indeed, Auger could only be said to have inflamed the delicate situation with his publication, dedicated to Charles IX, *Le Pédagogue d'armes*. In this work, Auger's firm rejection of a conciliatory position towards the Huguenots was evident as he argued the case for "just war."¹¹ Undeterred by his frosty reception from the monarch and his mother, in 1569, Auger attended the battles of Jarnac and Moncontour as the chaplain of the papal troops sent by Pius V (1504–1572) that fought together with the royal army. Jesuits were to play a crucial role in this campaign with Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) commissioned by the Society of Jesus to compose an official handbook for the "Christian soldier," developing a new model of militant Catholicism.¹² It was in this environment that Auger received a warm welcome from young Henri, duke of Anjou.

Auger further isolated himself from Catherine when he preached against the Peace of Saint-Germain (published in August 1570), singling her out for particular criticism. Filippo Cavriana (1536–1606), an informant to both the Spanish and the grand duke of Tuscany, reported in January 1571 that Auger

in every sermon blames peace so much that he seems to care for nothing but to stir up the people to arms and a new civil war [...]. The queen

9 Michel Pernot, "L'univers spirituel du Père Émond Auger, S.J., confesseur du roi Henri III," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 75 (1989): 103–14; George Hoffman, "Émond Auger et le contexte tridentin de l'essai 'Du repentir,'" *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 8th series, 21–22 (2001): 263–75.

10 Martin, *Henri III*, 30.

11 Emile V. Telle, "Un Manifeste anti-irénique à la veille de la Saint-Barthélemy," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 53, no. 3 (1991): 695–707.

12 Ariane Boltanski, "Forger le 'soldat chrétien': L'encadrement catholique des troupes pontificales et royales en France en 1568–1569," *Revue Historique* 669, no. 1 (2014): 51–85.

sought to admonish him gently, but this seems to have made him bolder, blaming her and insisting that the truth must be preached freely.¹³

Catherine was likewise disinclined to use the Jesuits sent by Philip II (1527–1598) as communication conduits. Philip had sent Francisco de Borja (1510–1572), superior general of the Society, to the Valois court in the hope of dissuading Catherine from policies accommodating the Protestants. Catherine made clear to Philip, however, that she would make her own decisions about the men to convey her messages: “Assured that Cardinal Alexandrino [the papal legate] has made clear to Your Majesty the response that the king my son and I made [...]; for this reason I gave no response via the general of the Jesuits.”¹⁴

For his part, Auger had also, it seems, identified those members of the royal family who were most sympathetic to the Jesuit mission, and Catherine was not among them. Soon after, he dedicated to Henri his translation of Jean-Pierre Maffeo’s Latin work, *Histoire des choses memorables sur le fait de la religion chrestienne*. Here, he praised the prince’s “religion and conscience (which surpasses all other mark of grandeur in you),” having been raised in the “Catholic Church, your gentle first nurse, that you love more than yourself [...], which you have shown not long ago in hazarding everything to maintain it in peace and safety.”¹⁵

Auger was not the first affiliate of the Society of Jesus to preach publicly against Catherine’s position, nor were Jesuits the only advocates among the ultra-Catholic faction to do so.¹⁶ In 1561, the Jesuit Jean Pelletier had been one of three preachers arrested in Toulouse for criticizing Catherine and Huguenot leaders.¹⁷ Henri Samier, a Jesuit thoroughly beholden to the views and patronage of Philip II, similarly used his *Acta tumultuum Gallicanorum*, possibly

13 January 12, 1571: Abel Desjardins, ed., *Negociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, tome 3 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1865), 642. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

14 February 1571: Hector de la Ferrière-Percy, ed., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1891), 315.

15 *Histoire des choses memorables, sur le fait de la religion chrestienne, dictes et exécutées és pays et royaumes des Indes orientales. Par ceux de la compagnie du nom de Jésus, depuis l’an 1542 jusques à present* (Lyons: Benoist Rigaud, 1571), 3^{r-v}.

16 See, for example, the analysis of the vicious propaganda surrounding Catherine and women at court in Una McIlvenna, *Scandal and Reputation at the Court of Catherine de Medici* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming), ch. 1.

17 Barnabé Farmian Durosoy, *Annales de la ville de Toulouse*, vol. 3 (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1772), 492.

co-authored with Auger, to castigate Catherine's politics.¹⁸ These Jesuit protagonists looked to France's leading men, whether the ambitious Guise dynasty or the sympathetic heir-apparent Henri, to support their politico-religious views. Under Catherine's conciliatory influence, they claimed, the kingdom had fallen into disaster.¹⁹ Evidently, these vocal individuals of the Society gave scant consideration to the prospect of grooming Catherine as a potential ally. But Catherine's cautious response to them reflected not only the growing influence of Auger on her son, Henri, but also the widespread traction of his views among the populace and the other relationships being forged by the ultra-Catholic nobility with the Society of Jesus.

Auger's compelling oratory and popularity required careful management by Catherine. Even Etienne Pasquier (1529–1615), no friend of the ultra-Catholic faction, remembered Auger in his work as a "great preacher" who with his confrère Juan Maldonado (Maldonnat) (1533–1583) had been "sent to announce their doctrine [and] were very favorably received."²⁰ Seventeenth-century works recalled the particular musicality of Auger's preaching, using techniques of varied tones that he had learnt from observing Italian preachers during his training in Rome, in order to touch the spirits and hearts of his audience.²¹ The attraction of his work certainly extended to women, including beyond the borders of France. The Spanish noblewoman Magdalene Pallarés y Ros so fervently followed Auger's work that Juan Lorenzo Palmireno (1524–1579) translated his catechism into Spanish for her in 1565: "I see that Your Ladyship listens so devoutly to the Society fathers and states so ardently that you would travel to France to listen to this father, that I risked the limits of my powers so that such fervent love be not dampened."²²

18 Martin, *Henri III*, 213, 109.

19 Henri Hauser, "Un récit catholique des trois premières guerres de religion: les *Acta tumultuum Gallicanorum*," *Revue historique* 108 (1911): 59–74; 294–318.

20 Etienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, ed. Dorothy Thickett (Geneva: Droz, 1966), 155–6.

21 Claude-François Menestrier, *Des Représentations en musique anciennes et modernes* (Paris: R. Guignard, 1681), 105–7, cited in Bruno Petey-Girard, "Le mécénat de la parole: l'esthétique spirituelle dans les oratoires royaux," in *Henri III mécène: des arts, des sciences et des lettres*, ed. Isabelle de Conihout, Jean-François Maillard, and Guy Poirier (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2006), 170–77, here 173.

22 Juan Lorenzo Palmireno, *Catecismo o summa de la religión christiana* (Valencia: Ioan Mey, 1565), 5^r, cited in Nieves Baranda Leturio, "Women's Reading Habits: Book Dedications to Female Patrons in Early Modern Spain," in *Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World*, ed. Rosilie Hernández and Anne J. Cruz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 19–39, here 29–30.

In the same period, Catherine could not have been unaware that France's elite Catholic families were patronizing Jesuit projects, which signaled their support of and allegiance to ultra-Catholic politics. Among the most prominent donors were Henriette de Clèves (1542–1601), *suo iure* fourth duchess of Nevers and countess of Rethel, and her husband, Ludovico Gonzaga (1539–1595). The acts creating the Jesuit college at Nevers in July 1572 were signed in the name of both Henriette and Ludovico.²³ Possevino had used his time at court during the previous decade to advocate repeatedly for the creation of just such colleges.²⁴ By the terms of this donation, the couple ceded buildings and lands in the town as the site for a new college that would house masters and children and serve as the location of their instruction in letters, Greek, Latin, and even philosophy by the fathers of the Society of Jesus.²⁵ This was a deeply political act: the college was a key strategy in the ambition of the duke and duchess to reconquer souls in the region, in a town that would provide refuge against the rising threat of Protestantism.²⁶ The act of foundation recalled

the miseries and calamities that have occurred in this realm as a result of the civil wars, under the pretext of a new opinion contrary to the former and Catholic religion, from which has followed not only ruin and devastation of a large part of the flourishing realm, but also the loss of an infinity of souls, who, having not been well founded in the Catholic religion, were too easily able to be driven by the ministers of these novelties into the darkness of error.

Like other “good and pious people not being able to suffer or see [this] without incredible regret [...] the duke and duchess saw that they had a particular duty to look to the conservation of the Church of God and the growth of it.” To that effect

they desire also that the subjects that it has pleased God to commit to them be raised and instituted in this religion, so that in all their lands and

23 Denis Crouzet, “Recherches sur la crise de l’aristocratie en France au XVI^e siècle: les dettes de la maison de Nevers,” *Histoire, économie et société* 1 (1982): 1–50, here 44.

24 See Marc Venard, “L’Apostolat de P. Antonio Possevino en France (1562–1570),” in *Les Jésuites parmi les hommes aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, ed. Guy and Geneviève Demerson (Clermont-Ferrand: Publications de l’Université de Clermont-Ferrand II, 1987), 249–53.

25 Archives Nationales, Minutier Central [MC], Etude VIII, Reg. 103, f. 149, cited in Crouzet, “Recherches,” 44.

26 Boltanski, *Les ducs de Nevers*, 372; Crouzet, “Recherches,” 44–45.

territories there is but one voice of salvation and that by the means of the foundation and donation that they make here, the poor can, like the rich, draw the grace of piety from the springs and streams of this Christian liberality.²⁷

These were devotional acts, but ones foregrounding clear political motivations and allegiances via affiliation with the Society of Jesus.

The couple's donation also included a rent of some 2,000 *livres* to help establish the college; there were additional ambitious plans to annex the abbey of Saint-Martin to expand the site and create a Jesuit university. The duchess's patronage of the Jesuits, in partnership with her husband, reflected the couple's pattern of other jointly-sponsored religious projects. These included the foundation of a convent of the Friars Minor in Rethel; the establishment of masses and services at the Augustinians in Paris, "considering the misery and calamity, and brevity of this mortal life in which there is a perpetual combat of the mind and flesh, [which] leads us so often to soil the purity of our souls with the filth of sin,"²⁸ and the endowment of a fund to provide dowries of fifty *livres* each for sixty poor girls a year. Here too the couple insisted that "the most perfect charity agreeable to God is that which is felt not only by the body but also by the mind and soul."²⁹ This pattern of religious patronage suggests that while the couple favored the Jesuits, they had not abandoned more traditional acts of charity nor the competing claims of other religious orders.

Following the pattern of religious patronage adopted by her sister Henriette, Catherine de Clèves (1548–1633), countess of Eu, likewise founded a Jesuit college in partnership with her second husband, Henri de Guise (1550–1588) (having converted from the Protestant faith she had shared with her first husband, Antoine de Croÿ [1541–1567]). The college at Eu, within the wealthy *comté* that was part of the inheritance Catherine brought to the marriage, was first recorded in an act of January 1582. Signed between the couple and Claude Matthieu, provincial of the Society in France, this placed direction of the new institution in the hands of twenty-five Jesuit fathers.³⁰ This foundation was intended to form part of the strategic expansion of the Guise and a more militant Catholicism into Normandy, as the foundation contract made clear: "to

27 MC, Etude VIII, Reg. 103, f. 149, cited in Crouzet, "Recherches," 44.

28 Ibid., 45.

29 Ibid., 44. See also Lisa Keane Elliott, "Charitable 'Intent' in Late Sixteenth-century France: The Nevers Foundation and Single Poor Catholic Girls," in *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne M. Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 159–82.

30 Charles Bréard, *Histoire de College d'Eu* (Eu: A-M. d'Hocquelus, 1893), 19.

conserve and amplify in their lands and territories” the Catholic religion, focusing on the instruction of youth, “the foundation and nursery of the republic and realm.”³¹ Guise’s unexpected death in 1588 disrupted these developments, but his widow would later emerge as a strong supporter of the Jesuits in her own right.

Thus, when Catherine de Medici committed to paper what appears to be the first evidence of her opinion about Auger in a letter to her son Henri, newly elected king of Poland, in May 1573, it was a carefully-couched document. From Fontainebleau, Henri’s “good mother” wrote:

Be on your guard with master Aymont, the Jesuit, for he writes everywhere that you have agreed to extirpate all those who were ever Huguenots, and that he knows because it is he who engages with your conscience. These rumors do great damage to all the matters that are arising.³²

Catherine considered that Auger’s speech about her son’s intentions threatened the goodwill of the European Protestant delegates with whose support the crown of Poland had been bestowed upon Henri and who expected to see an amelioration of the status of their confessional brethren in France as a result. It also potentially damaged the delicate peace process in which she and Henri’s brother, Charles IX, were engaged in France. This included a possible marriage between Henri, king of Navarre (1553–1610), and Catherine’s daughter, Marguerite de Valois (1553–1615). Auger was meanwhile ministering to the troops and to Henri’s personal spiritual needs at La Rochelle, where Catholic troops were assaulting the Huguenot stronghold.³³ Indeed, the unusual intensity of Henri’s devotional practices was already raising eyebrows and filling the correspondence of foreign witnesses.³⁴ Distancing himself from Auger would, in Catherine’s view, send a strong signal that the Society’s views did not enjoy particular royal favor nor was Auger a direct conduit to the mind of the king of Poland. By July, Auger had been sent on a mission removing him from the royal circle, undertaking a pilgrimage to Loreto on Henri’s behalf at the very moment that the Edict of Boulogne, leaving La Rochelle in Huguenot hands, was signed.³⁵

31 Ibid., 19–20. See also Carroll, *Noble Power*, 143–4.

32 May 30, 1573; La Ferrière-Percy, ed., *Lettres*, 4:225.

33 Pernot, “L’univers spirituel,” 105.

34 Martin, *Henri III*, 50.

35 Ibid., 52–53.

Catherine's distrust of hardline Jesuit politics in France during the 1560s and early 1570s, exemplified through Auger's virulent works and influential sermons, stemmed from her perception of their danger to a royal strategy of confessional accommodation, compromise, and moderation. Her ambitions for the Valois dynasty were plainly incompatible with that of the Jesuits' leading men in France and were reflected in her disengagement with them as a patron and as political influences upon her. At the same time, however, the Jesuits attracted financial support from other elite women such as Henriette and Catherine de Clèves, who signaled through the foundation of Jesuit colleges their deep fervor and determination to restore the Catholic faith within their domains, and in so doing, to indicate their allegiances to the ultra-Catholic faction. How it was, then, that Catherine came to term Auger "our Master Heymont" in a 1579 letter is explored in the next section.

"Our Master Heymont": The Politics of the *Dévôt(e)*

In September 1578, Catherine was touring the south of the French kingdom, hoping to quell tensions between Huguenots and Catholics in the region. At Bordeaux, she sought to enforce the dissolution of Catholic confraternities and leagues—a requirement of the 1577 Peace of Bergerac that had met with significant local resistance.³⁶ Unusually, as was revealed in Catherine's letter to Henri III, now the French king, it was Émond Auger who came to her assistance. Catherine explained that Auger's sermon in support of the crown's edict had been heard by most of the leading Catholic dignitaries:

I was very pleased that Maintenon arrived here this morning, and that he heard the sermon that Master Hémon Auger made, where [...] each took great pleasure to see that the great path is open to follow what is the service of God and the obedience that is due to you.³⁷

In something of a *volte face*, Auger had used his considerable oratorical power in favor of Catherine's political strategy and against what seemed to be the evident interests of his ultra-Catholic brethren.

Auger's decision to align himself with the royal family may have been a result of the loss of his primary patron at court, the cardinal of Lorraine. The latter had

³⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁷ September 29, 1578: Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse, ed., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, vol. 6 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1897), 40.

died in Avignon in 1574, causing Auger to compose a panegyric discourse, *Bref discours sur la mort de feu monsieur le cardinal de Lorraine* (Troyes, [1574], Orleans, 1575, Paris [1575]). Pierre de L'Estoile (1546–1611) was fairly scathing of this work “in which he spoke of the prelate as though he were an angel.”³⁸ However Auger exploited the work to emphasize his proximity to the court, recalling how Lorraine had died in his arms and praising the piety of the king and queen that he personally witnessed as they came to visit the ailing cardinal.³⁹

Catherine's temporary compact with Auger was reinforced by her employment of him soon after to convey her views to the pope. In September 1579, Catherine wrote that “our master Heymont” would “render a good account to Your Holiness of all matters and faithfully tell you what I have entrusted to him.”⁴⁰ This contrasted strikingly with her earlier refusal to employ Auger's fellow Jesuit, Borja, as a trusted messenger to Philip II.

At the same time, Jesuits were increasing their access to the royal family, but in a new role that was less explicitly political. In February 1575, Henri III had married Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont (1553–1601), a member of a subordinate branch of the house of Lorraine and cousin to the Guises. Her politico-religious activities at the court have rarely been the focus of attention, but her letters show that she took a keen interest in ensuring that family members retained key religious benefices at this period, writing to the French ambassador in Rome and interceding directly with the pope to do so.⁴¹ Antoine Malet, theologian of the Faculty of Paris and confessor to the duchesses of Mercoeur and Vendôme, later described how Louise had exerted “herself diligently to find in the realm a good counselor and confessor, among several learned and pious men, specially selected among all the secular and regular ecclesiastics.”⁴²

38 Pierre de l'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du regne de Henri III*, vol. 1, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 101.

39 Larissa Juliet Taylor, “Funeral Sermons and Orations as Religious Propaganda in Sixteenth-century France,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 236.

40 September 13, 1579: Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse, ed., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, vol. 7 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1899), 514–5.

41 See letters of June 24 and August 4, 1580 to Louis Chasteigner de La Rochepey, sieur d'Abain in Michel François (ed.), “Cinquante lettres inédites d'une reine de France: Louise de Vaudémont, femme de Henri III,” *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* (1943): 133–4.

42 Antoine Malet, *Œconomie spirituelle et temporelle de la vie et maison, noblesse et religion des nobles et des grands du monde, dressée sur la vie, piété et sage économie de Louyse de Lorraine, Royné de France et de Pologne* (Paris: Eustache Foucault, 1619), 276.

She chose the Jesuit Anselme de Berengreuille, who remained her confessor and director of conscience for fourteen years. Moreover, at the death of this “very learned and clear-sighted good father,” Louise engaged another Jesuit, Etienne Sinson.⁴³ Henri too received spiritual direction and support from Claude Matthieu for some years, although Matthieu was later dismissed as too closely aligned with the League. Both members of the royal couple, Louise in particular, surrounded themselves with Jesuits in key positions of spiritual authority.

Louise also shared Henri’s enthusiasm for devotional practices, engaging in a range of pilgrimages and processions that were in part designed to help the royal couple produce a much-needed Valois heir. Ambassador René de Lucinge reported to the duke of Savoy in September 1585 how “the reigning queen [went] on foot to Pontoise on pilgrimage.”⁴⁴ In November of the same year, Louise went to Burgundy for three weeks for “some devotions,” while the king retired for six days to St. Germain-en-Laye.⁴⁵ The early 1580s were years of intense devotional activity at the court, in which Auger was heavily involved.⁴⁶ During the later 1570s, he had been pivotal in establishing several penitential confraternities in Toulouse, Lyon, and Dôle.⁴⁷ In 1583, Henri recalled Auger to the court to assist in his ambitious plan to create several new oratories and confraternities. The Auger of the late 1570s and 1580s was no longer preaching the “just war” that he had favored in his *Pédagogue d’armes*, but instead invested his energies in supporting the royal family in a range of devotional practices that now took center stage.⁴⁸ These included fasting, prayers, and processions that visibly brought the Catholic community together, and which publicly highlighted the power of the spiritual men who advocated or indeed helped to

43 Malet, *Économie spirituelle*, 276; Jacqueline Boucher, *Deux épouses et reines à la fin du XVI^e siècle: Louise de Lorraine et Marguerite de France* (Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne, 1995), 253.

44 September 8, 1585; René de Lucinge, *Lettres sur les débuts de la Ligue (1585)*, ed. Alain Dufour (Geneva: Droz, 1964), 183.

45 November 19, 1585; Lucinge, *Lettres*, 243.

46 On the intense devotional practices of a wider group of women and men at the court at this period, see Jacqueline Boucher, *Société et mentalités autour de Henri III* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1981), 4:1464–82.

47 Pernot, “L’univers spirituel,” 103.

48 Jacqueline Boucher, “L’ordre du St Esprit dans la pensée politique et religieuse de Henri III,” *Cahier d’histoire* 18, no. 2 (1973): 129–42; Petey-Girard, “Le mécénat de la parole,” 171; Fabienne Le Bars, “Le relieur des livres: essai de typologie,” in *Henri III mécène*, 243.

devise them.⁴⁹ L'Estoile, not a sympathetic observer, noted the theatricality of one procession in March 1583, in which Henri was dressed in the same garb as his fellow participants who included “brother Emont Auger, the Jesuit (formerly a street performer and still exhibiting all the traits and manners of it).”⁵⁰ Malet, however, recalled the atmosphere of piety of the court, naming Auger among its stars, and highlighted the “extraordinary devotions” Louise undertook, processing on foot with Catherine de Medici and her daughter, Marguerite, as relics were carried through the streets of Paris.⁵¹

Auger was now, evidently, a convert to the potential impact of female devotional practices. In the 1583 statutes that he wrote for the Congrégation de l'Annonciation Nôtre-Dame, Catherine was singled out for particular praise: “our good prince had been so fashioned from his early years, by the secret favor of the Holy Spirit and the good conduct of the Queen his mother, that as he grew in years and authority he also reinforced this holy zeal.”⁵² Likewise, Auger emphasized the spiritual influence of devoted women in his *Metanoologie* (Paris, 1584) in which he defended the newly-established penitential vehicles from their detractors. Auger recalled an incident at Toulouse in which a spontaneous outburst of female devotion had been responsible for the foundation of confraternities in that city. He remembered as many as 250 of “the most honorable women of Toulouse, firm in their religion and very faithful to the king” gathering on some occasions, who performed

extraordinary rigors on themselves [and] walked two by two covered in rough cloth, their feet bare, over the mud and the bitter cold, a torch

49 Robert Schneider, “Mortification on Parade: Penitential Processions in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century France,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 10 (1986): 123–46; Andrew E. Barnes, “Religious Anxiety and Devotional Change in Sixteenth-century French Penitential Confraternities,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 3 (1988): 389–405; Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540–1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 122, 138; Benoist Pierre, “Le corps pénitent et l'ordre social chez les religieux parisiens de la fin du xvi^e siècle,” *Mémoires de la Fédération des Sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île-de-France* 55 (2004): 63–78.

50 Pierre de L'Estoile, *Registre-Journal du Regne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, vol. 4 (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 76.

51 Malet, *Economie spirituelle*, 279.

52 Louis Cimber and Félix Danjou, ed., “Statuts généraux des pénitents de la Congrégation de l'Annonciation Notre-Dame,” *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France* 10 (1836): 437–59, here 441.

in their hand, a large crucifix in front carried by some among the women, to visit the four selected churches.⁵³

That Auger was a newcomer to the possibilities of female devotion was hinted at by his characterization of the women's "marvelous and unheard-of devotion" and his revelation that "women in groups among themselves, encourage each other to this exercise of penitence, sometimes more rigorously than men."⁵⁴

Auger was certainly perceived as an influence on the royal family by those beyond the court, as indicated in the works of the bourgeois apothecary Nicolas Houel (c. 1524–1587), who sought to attract the patronage of Henri, Louise, and Catherine for his personal charitable endeavor, the *Maison de charité chrétienne*. This was a newly-established almshouse designed to aid the sick, poor, and needy, as well as provide pharmaceutical training for deserving orphan boys.⁵⁵ Across a series of works, Houel connected directly with the spiritual politics at court. In a set of manuscript designs attributed to Houel, both Louise and Henri were depicted processing past a lavish imaginary *Maison* amongst other contemporary buildings in Paris.⁵⁶ In the manuscript in which Houel set out the spiritual justification for royal sponsorship of the *Maison*, the *Traité de la charité chrestienne* (1578), a young Henri was depicted, with Catherine to his left, as the recipient of a miniature chapel from the *Maison* complex.⁵⁷ Louise and Catherine are both portrayed in another scene, attending with Henri the imaginary foundation of Houel's hoped-for grand

53 Émond Auger, *Metanoeologie sur le sujet de l'Archicongregation des Penitens de l'Annonciation de Notre Dame, et de toutes telles autres devotieuses assemblées, en l'église sainte* (Paris: Jamet Mettayer, 1584), 188–9.

54 Auger, *Metanoeologie*, 188.

55 See the recent analysis of Valérie Auclair, "Nicolas Houel et Petrus Stephanus: un manuscrit enluminé du XVI^e siècle, le *Traité de la charité chrestienne*," *Revue de l'art* 132 (2001): 9–28; Lisa Keane Elliott, "In Pursuit of Charity: Nicolas Houel and his *Maison de la charité chrétienne* in Late Sixteenth-century Paris," in *Experiences of Charity, 1250–1650: Revisiting Religious Motivations in the Charitable Endeavour*, ed. Anne M. Scott (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 149–69.

56 Bibliothèque nationale de France [BNF], Département des Estampes, Rés. Pd. 30. Valérie Auclair, "Un logis pour l'âme des rois. Nicolas Houel (ca. 1520–ca. 1587) et les dessins de procession à la maison de la charité chrétienne pour la famille royale," in *Henri III mécène*, 39–54; Susan Broomhall, "Hearts on Fire: Compassion and Love in Nicolas Houel's *Traité de la charité chrestienne*," in *Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100–1800*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 121–60.

57 Held at Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich, Kraków. See Broomhall, "Hearts on Fire," 134, fig. 7.3.

facility. Houel trained his sights on patronage from all three members of the royal family.

Houel also specifically targeted Louise and Catherine in his published works. His 1580 *Advertissement et déclaration de l'institution de la Maison de la charité chrestienne* was dedicated to Louise, whom he exhorted to use her influence "to beg the king that from charity the Maison be built." He also noted the support of other elite women at court.⁵⁸ In his later works, Houel implied that it was Louise who first responded to his call for support, securing Henri's assistance.⁵⁹ Significantly, in seeking the support of the royal family, Houel made clear his awareness of the growing power of the Jesuits. He specifically noted that Auger's *Catéchisme* would feature in the reading material for the boys in his Maison.⁶⁰ In 1586, Houel dedicated to Catherine his new work, *Les Mémoires et recherches de la dévotion, piété et charité des illustres roynes de France*. He publicized Catherine's previous support for the Maison and reminded her publicly of her commitment to build its chapel.⁶¹ Houel's strategies for patronage highlight a layman's understanding of the politico-spiritual aspirations of royal women and men and the influence of the Jesuits at court.

The arrival of Louise de Lorraine as queen thus marked a period in which the Jesuits gained broader and more visible support in significant religious relationships with the royal family. Louise's appointment of a Jesuit as her confessor signaled both her personal devotion and her dynastic politics, by aligning her with her husband and the ultra-Catholic leadership offered by her Lorraine and Guise relatives. However, in common with Catherine and Henri, she carefully balanced the new opportunities to demonstrate her intense fervor with the traditional outlets for charity expected of a queen. Moreover, the apparent ascendancy of the Jesuits, or at least of a few key individuals, had occurred generally by subordinating hardline Catholic politics to the personal devotional interests of the monarchs and even, to some extent,

58 Nicolas Houel, *Advertissement et déclaration de l'institution de la maison de la charité chrestienne établie ès faux-bourgs Saint Marcel, par l'autorité du roy et sa court de parlement, 1578; ensemble plusieurs saintes exhortations, instructions et enseignemens tant en prose qu'en vers pour induire le chrestien à aimer Dieu et les pauvres, le tout recueilly des Saintes Escritures et autoritez des saints docteurs de l'Église Catholique* (Paris: P. Chevillot, 1580), Aiiiir and Biir.

59 See *Les mémoires et recherches de la dévotion, piété, et charité des illustres roynes de France, ensemble les églises, monastères, hospitaux et collèges qu'elles ont fondez et édifiez en divers endroits de ce royaume* (Paris: Jamet Mettayer, 1586).

60 See *L'Ordre et police en l'institution de l'Apothicairerie*, article 6, p. 17 (BNF, N.A.F. 19737).

61 Ernest Lépinois, *Nicolas Houel, apothicaire et bourgeois parisien, fondateur du Jardin et de l'École des apothicaires de Paris* (Dijon: E. Jacquot, 1911), 69–74.

the political needs of the crown. Thus, as the following section explores, when Jesuit and Valois interests failed to remain aligned, Catherine's support in particular also waned.

"His Bad Advice": Destructive Devotion

As Henri increasingly retreated into intense devotions, Auger was targeted as the man responsible for encouraging his practices. Catherine was understood to be most frustrated by the Jesuit, seeing in Auger's influence Henri's neglect of his responsibility as monarch. As the ambassador of Rudolf II (1552–1612), Auger de Gislen (1522–1592), seigneur de Busbecq, wrote to his master in June 1583: "It is said that the Queen mother has strongly abused Father Edmond, the Jesuit whom the king has taken as his [spiritual] director. She reproaches him since, because of his bad advice, her son neglects important affairs of state—he has made a monk from a king—to the great prejudice of the realm."⁶²

Auger retained at least the semblance of Catherine's favor in August 1582 when she referred in a message to Arnaud du Ferrier (c. 1508–1585) to the letter she had received "from good Father Edmond," who had informed her of the positive welcome that he had received in Italy when on pilgrimage to Loreto. Catherine asked Du Ferrier to confirm with Auger what she had already told the man himself—that he should remain in Italy to await a gift she would soon send, asking Ferrier to insist upon her instructions to Auger "as this is a thing I take very much to heart."⁶³ Catherine's strategy to keep Auger at a distance failed however. By November, she was making other arrangements for the presentation of her gift, for, she told her correspondent perhaps with some trepidation that "master Esmond has commenced his path back to France."⁶⁴

Auger returned to the court and to Henri's favor, as Catherine feared. The English ambassador reported that Catherine had even cried in his presence about Auger's influence on her son.⁶⁵ When Henri went on retreat to the Capuchins in March 1584, he had written to secretary of state, Nicolas Neufville de Villeroy (1543–1617), that anything pressing or important was to be shown to

62 [June] 25, 1583: "Lettres d'Auger de Gislen, seigneur de Busbec, ambassadeur de l'Empereur Rodolphe II aupres de Henri III, roi de France, écrites à l'empereur son maître," *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France* 10 (1836): 86–87.

63 August 27, 1582: Gustave Baguenault de Puchesse, ed., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, vol. 8 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1901), 53.

64 November 28, 1582: *Ibid.*, 74.

65 Martin, *Henri III*, 119.

“the queen without sending it to me.”⁶⁶ In her own hand, Catherine expressed her concerns to Villeroy of Henri’s potential neglect of his duties from his latest retreat among the Capuchins: “I would very much like the king’s voyage not to be disadvantageous, either to his health or to his affairs, for devotion is good, and the king his father made voyages to Cléry and to Saint-Martin-de-Tours, but he never neglected anything that was required for his affairs.”⁶⁷ Auger seemed aware of these criticisms, for in his *Metanoëologie* published that year, he suggested that Henri’s praiseworthy spiritual retreats were only undertaken “after having carefully reviewed and arranged affairs of state” and that they helped to revitalize the king “in order to re-assume the management of this great kingdom.”⁶⁸

Catherine was not alone in her concerns about her son. The Society’s leaders also expressed fears about the destructive political consequences of Auger’s influence upon Henri.⁶⁹ Equally disappointed were proponents of the Catholic League who hoped for a firmer political commitment in their favor from the pious king. They were supported by other Jesuits such as Matthieu who had been superior in Paris from 1582 to 1584, for a time confessor to the ultra-Catholic opponent of the king, the duke of Guise, and liaising with the duke of Nevers as an advocate for the League. When the king retired again in December 1585, he demanded that no one, not even Catherine, was to disturb him. The papal nuncio Girolamo Ragazzoni (1537–1592) observed how acutely aware Auger was of Catherine’s ire. In conversation, Auger had reportedly told him:

I know that the Queen Mother and others blame me for being the cause of holding the King to this way [of life] but God is my witness to how many times I have persuaded him to be devout, [but] certainly not to do as monks do.⁷⁰

By 1587, Auger’s position at court was untenable for Catherine, the ultra-Catholic faction, and his Jesuit brethren. However unwilling Henri was to

66 BNF, N.A.F., 1243, f. 41, cited in Baguenault de Puchesse, ed., *Lettres*, 8: 178, n. 1.

67 March 19, 1584: *Ibid.*, 178.

68 Auger, *Metanoëologie*, 4^v–5^r; second quote 4^v.

69 Martin, *Henri III*, 46; Harro Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

70 December 1, 1585: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Francia, 285, ff. 181–82, cited and translated in Martin, *Henri III*, 152.

part with Auger, he was, like Henri Samier and Claude Matthieu before him, eventually dismissed from the court.⁷¹

While Catherine's relationship with Jesuits at court remained cautious at best, other women found opportunities for expression through their relationships with the Society. Sometime after the murder of her husband in 1588, the widowed duchess of Guise, Catherine de Clèves, began to reprise architectural and artistic projects in association with the Jesuits. By 1613, she had commissioned the chapel on her lands at Eu that was dedicated to Loyola and completed in 1624.⁷² Her role as donor was noted visibly and prominently in black marble and gold lettering on a plaque on the edifice. It was in this chapel too that Clèves elected to install the mausoleum for her husband (whose ashes had been dispersed at his death) and her own tomb in lavish Genoese marble.⁷³ In the church of Saint Laurent in Eu lay her heart, encased in a bronze urn on a column of black marble. Upon this was inscribed recognition of her religious zeal in conventional terms, praising

her singular piety towards God, her liberality towards all sorts of paupers, captives or those of the mendicant orders, her kindness and her generosity towards others, founding and supporting churches as much as she could [...], generously giving more than two hundred antependia and chasubles of different colors, the majority of which she had worked with her own needle.⁷⁴

Clèves's was perhaps the boldest statement in favor of the Jesuits and, in line with those of other female donors of the Jesuits in Europe, one largely created in her widowhood.⁷⁵ At the same time, she was a sponsor of other emerging orders of the Catholic Reformation, providing significant financial support also for the introduction of both Ursuline and Capuchin convents in Eu. Thus Clèves affiliated herself with the innovative Catholic religiosity of the period, but never exclusively with the Society of Jesus.

71 For analysis of their careers in France during this period, see Martin, *Henri III* and Nicola M. Sutherland, *Henry IV of France and the Politics of Religion: 1572–1596*, vol. 1 (Bristol: Elm Bank, 2002), ch. 2 and 3.

72 Bréard, *Histoire*, 71–2.

73 See Jean Coural, "Les tombeaux du duc et duchesse de Guise à Eu," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire d'art français* (1957): 251–55.

74 Hilarion de Coste, *Les élogies et les vies des reynes, des princesses, et des dames illustres en piété, en courage et en doctrine, qui ont fleury de nostre temps, et du temps de nos peres* (Paris: Sebastien and Gabriel Cramoisy, 1647), 302–3.

75 Conelli, "A Typical Patron," 412.

The relationship of the Jesuits to elite women in this period depended on perceptions of the Society's political influence. The widely known close ties of Samier and Matthieu to Spain and the Guise and Nevers families saw them sent away from court, while the perceived role of Auger in encouraging the king's extreme devotion to the neglect of his royal duties, was equally detrimental to the Valois dynasty. The Jesuits' value to Valois dynastic politics was, it seems, fundamental to Catherine's relationship with the Society. Matthieu's departure temporarily reduced the direct Jesuit influence among the Guise clan but over the course of her forty-five year widowhood, Catherine de Clèves committed significant funds to promote the Society in her lands, signaling her allegiance to the spiritual politics of the Catholic Reformation.

Conclusion

This brief analysis highlights that, in this period, the key group of Jesuits involved in elite French politics was relatively small. These men were the vanguard of the Society, feeling their way regarding the operation of power at the court. In general, they attempted to forge alliances with the monarchs and aristocratic dynasties who would assist the Society's establishment and eventual expansion, coalitions that inevitably entangled them in the complex politics of the Valois court. It was thus that Émond Auger's activities could be seen by some onlookers to represent Jesuit spiritual expressions and interest in politics, while other members of the Society, particularly beyond France, found his behaviors and decisions curiously hard to reconcile with the wider aims and ambitions of the Society.⁷⁶ Individual Jesuits likewise adopted varied positions about the value of elite women to advancing their cause, and cultivated or ignored them accordingly. Analyzing the nature of the relationships between elite Catholic women at the French court and the Jesuits, however, reveals a wide variety of roles that women understood individual Jesuit men to be able to perform in their interests. These included roles as confessors, as political advisors, and as conduits for information they wished to have conveyed as well as to acquire from others. In addition, Jesuits, and the Society of Jesus more broadly, functioned for elite women as objects of patronage, through which

76 In his careful negotiations with, and support for, the crown, Auger in some ways anticipated the complex accommodating policies of later Jesuits who became staunch supporters of Henri IV's right to rule. See Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590–1615)* (Aldershot-Rome: Ashgate-Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2005).

the latter could demonstrate their political allegiances, mark their attachment to new forms of spirituality, or express their devotional fervor.

As this preliminary study has shown, the Jesuits received varying degrees of support from elite women in different positions of power and in the context of specific and changing circumstances. For Catherine de Medici, it appears that any favor to the Jesuits was dynastically motivated, and highly conditional on their ability to achieve her particular political goals. In the case of Louise de Lorraine, Jesuit attachment to particular devotional practices aligned with her own spiritual interests, as well as with the preferred religious expressions of her husband and the political interests of her natal relatives who promoted the ultra-Catholic cause with which the Society was seen to be allied. In a similar way, for both Henriette and Catherine de Clèves, significant financial investment in the establishment and expansion of the Society in their lands reflected their eagerness to see a renewed Catholic faith dominate the French spiritual and political landscape. Married to men who were widely understood to be France's leading ultra-Catholic protagonists, both women used their patronage to send a powerful social message about their personal political allegiances and hopes for France's future.

Thus, women engaged with the Jesuits, or did not, as it suited them personally, politically, and spiritually, in highly individual ways, reflecting Conelli's conclusion that female patronage was "sometimes inspired by piety, more often by politics and further complicated by the calculated relationship between these women and the Society of Jesus."⁷⁷ Importantly, what this initial assessment has revealed is that the narrative of the Jesuits' initial interactions with the French court can be expanded to include a more nuanced analysis of the contribution of elite women, who participated side by side in these activities with their husbands and sons.

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77 Conelli, "A Typical Patron," 435–36.