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Megan C. Armstrong, *The Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers during the Wars of Religion, 1560-1600*. Rochester, N.Y. and Woodbridge, Suffolk: University of Rochester Press, 2004. 278 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 (cl). ISBN 1-58046-175-1.

Review by Penny Roberts, University of Warwick.

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Historians of the French religious wars of the sixteenth century have long sought to identify the factors which led to the ultimate triumph of Catholicism in the face of a dynamic and militant Protestant threat. The Catholic response to Protestantism has been reassessed with particular regard to the psychology behind the vehement opposition to royal religious policy and the appeal of the Catholic League, to the role of Gallicanism and noble support, as well as to that of radical preachers and pamphleteers. Above all, religion has been firmly placed at the centre of recent accounts.[1] Megan Armstrong's approach complements such studies by focusing on the contribution to the ferment of a particular religious group, the Observant Franciscans. As stated at the outset, "The primary intention of this book is to show how a medieval spiritual tradition ... became an agent of political change" (p. 2). By establishing the influence of medieval ideals upon the sixteenth-century mindset, Armstrong presents a plausible case for the importance of Franciscan support for the radical position of the Catholic League—a contention reflected in the familiar and evocative image of their participation in an armed procession in 1590 reproduced here on the dust-jacket. Indeed, the Franciscans are granted a central role in the Catholic response to and counterattack on Protestantism. Even more ambitiously, Armstrong presents a case for the Franciscan impact on the development of the early modern French state. In particular, her analysis is close to that recently presented by Alain Tallon in asserting the importance of Henri IV's reign in establishing a Catholic monarchy as a "defining ideological characteristic" (p. 2).[2] We are provided with a careful reconstruction of the nature of Franciscan influence drawn from a range of quite disparate and scattered sources in which, appropriately enough, the corporate identity of the order is to the fore.

Although it purports to cover the whole period of the religious wars, and does explore the Franciscan reputation for anti-Protestantism even prior to the conflict, this is primarily a study of the period of Catholic League ascendancy in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Nevertheless, this book is surprisingly rich in the wide range of its coverage. It is excellent on the historical context of the Franciscan order, its medieval origins and traditions, its internal divisions, and the challenges it faced. Armstrong explores a number of facets of the Franciscan tradition which suited it to the spiritual turbulence of the wars, which in turn gave it a renewed relevance. She emphasises, in particular, the importance of the order's preaching role which developed later in the conflict into a politically radical and subversive message in criticism of the crown. Another advantage was the natural symbiosis between Franciscan spirituality and lay piety which explains the influence and popularity of the former during the wars. It led, Armstrong argues, to the development of a collective responsibility for cleansing society through which spiritual agency was given to the laity encouraging their active, even violent role on behalf of their coreligionists. She believes that the Franciscans helped to fill a spiritual vacuum in France left by a politically pragmatic monarchy and a distant papacy. Furthermore, the independence of the Franciscan order, especially with regard to episcopal control, lent its members a certain autonomy and attracted papal support. Finally, the high regard in which the order was held lent an aura of legitimacy to the authority of the League, reinforced by the Franciscan emphasis on tradition and continuity.

It is the Paris friary which is the central focus of this study, although the activities of Franciscans in provincial centres are interwoven throughout, and the importance of their role in spreading the League

message emphasised. The international dimension of the conflicts within the Paris friary reflecting papal and Gallican interests broadens again what could appear to be a localised study, as does the discussion of Franciscan missionary endeavours. A chapter is devoted to the importance of the training given to some in the famous faculty of theology of the University of Paris (and the reader may ponder on how much the resistance to their presence in the faculty from members of the secular clergy contributed to Franciscan politicization). The prestige of belonging to an institution which determined French orthodoxy is evident, and the influence of humanism provided faculty members with the effective rhetorical tools for combating their opponents. The faculty was a bastion against Calvinism, resisted compromise of any sort, and supported the League in its opposition to the Huguenot leader Henri of Navarre's candidacy for the throne. The most effective chapters, in this reviewer's opinion, are those on patronage and political activism respectively. In chapter four, the role of lay patrons as supporters of the friary is explored. As Armstrong puts it, it was necessary for the order to integrate into "the social, political and economic fabric of France" to survive (p. 94). Put crudely, wealth was needed to support the mendicants, especially to cover expensive university fees, and elite patronage promoted their ministry. Those who provided for these needs reaped the considerable spiritual benefits of being associated with the Franciscan order. The book's appendix, a table of foundations made at the friary, demonstrates that patronage involved not only sword, and primarily robe nobility, but also the middling sort (who made up most of the order's members too), as well as a striking number of women. The predominance of the robe nobility reflects the order's urban base and the increasing social status of this group. The presence of both royalists and Leaguers among their number also underlines the separation of ecclesiastical patronage from political faction. Chapter six provides a careful examination of Franciscan sermons and writings, and discusses the order's continuing hostility to Henri IV even after the League's capitulation. Just as it had opposed the royal edicts of pacification during the wars, it continued this stance until Henri had proved the sincerity and permanency of his conversion to Catholicism and that he would not continue to favour his former coreligionists. Indeed, the first Bourbon king cultivated good relations with the religious orders, and treated even his most vehement opponents with characteristic clemency.

This is an extremely readable account, written in a lively and fluent style, establishing an effective balance between quotation, anecdote, and analysis. The main themes are clearly enunciated and followed through, and it presents a convincing case for the importance of the Franciscans' political and spiritual role and their contribution to the triumph of Catholicism. As is so often not the case in monograph studies of a specialised aspect of the wars, the wider political and religious background is fully explored, stressing the peculiar association made between political and spiritual disorder. Impressive also is the wider context of the position of the Catholic Church and the role of the mendicant orders within it in the sixteenth century. This broad coverage lends the book the feel of a more general than monograph study at times, which is not really a criticism, but does lead to questions about the extent of our evidence for, and, therefore, potential knowledge of, the Franciscan position during the wars. Some issues could have been explored further, such as how the encouragement of mendicant-style preaching by Tridentine decrees fared in France a country otherwise hostile to Trent, and the Franciscan global mission on several fronts mentioned in the conclusion. Discussion of relations with the *parlement* might also have benefited from engagement with the recent work of Sylvie Daubresse and Michel De Waele.<sup>[3]</sup> A few names go astray: Louis prince of Condé becomes Henri (p. 13), and those of historians "Jeanne" Garrisson and "Phillip" Benedict (p. 30). There is repeated misspelling of resistance as "resistence", and the odd use of "conceptionalization" rather than conceptualization, and "conceptioning" instead of conceiving. The conclusions of the study are suggestive, but also open to debate. This reviewer was not convinced that a conclusive case was made that Catholicism became a central preoccupation of the monarchy only at the end of the sixteenth century, or the claim that this development contributed to a new understanding of the state. This is surely too great a leap for such a multifaceted and contested phenomenon. Nevertheless, the discussion of the debt of early modern statecraft to a medieval spiritual legacy, the "corpus mysticum", via the religious orders is fascinating. Also, the suggestion that without the support of the Franciscans the Catholic League would never have

garnered the support necessary to challenge the authority of the crown is probably the most persuasive and challenging of the book's arguments. It adds a new dimension to our understanding of the operation, influence and dramatic success of the League which needs to be incorporated into existing interpretations, and it is a credit to the author that it has done so.

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## NOTES

[1] This trend in the literature was first remarked upon in the review article by Mack P. Holt, "Putting Religion back into the Wars of Religion," *French Historical Studies* 18 (1993): 524-551. Among more recent works, see Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford and New York; Oxford University Press, 1999); Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge, Suffolk; University of Rochester Press, 1999); Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT; Ashgate, 2002).

[2] Alain Tallon, *Conscience nationale et sentiment religieux en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Essai sur la vision gallicane du monde* (Paris; Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

[3] Sylvie Daubresse, *Le Parlement de Paris ou la voix de la raison (1559-1589)* (Geneva; Droz, 2005), discussing themes explored in her earlier articles; Michel de Waele, *Les Relations entre le Parlement de Paris et Henri IV* (Paris; Publisud, 2000).

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