

The Justificative Discourse of Louis de Condé during the Second and Third Wars of Religion (1567-1568)¹

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Abstract: The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) posed the biggest threat to the French Monarchy since the darkest days of the Hundred Years War. Not only that the royal authority had, in practical terms, reached its lowest ebb since in more than a hundred and fifty years, but the factions involved, both Catholic and Protestant, developed theories of resistance which advocated for popular sovereignty and the right to depose (and, in some cases, even kill) tyrannical kings. Yet, this radicalism came from the lower ranks of the belligerent factions and was not shared by their leadership, who was more careful to safeguard the prestige of the monarchy. This is most true for the Huguenots princes and their allies, who constantly refused to openly name the king as their enemy, regardless of how much their relationship with the Crown had degraded. At the beginning of the wars, the most prominent political personality amongst the Huguenots, Louis, prince of Condé, insisted, through an extensive campaign of propaganda, that the Protestant rebellion was aiming to actually protect the (underage) king, Charles IX, against a coterie of Catholic aristocrats who was keeping him prisoner and to restore the overall peace and justice of the kingdom, with more specifically Protestant grievances being pushed into the background. But, at the start of the second war of religion, in 1567, the tone of Condé’s propaganda started to gradually change, his justificative texts speaking instead of a “moral captivity” of a king instead of him being a physical prisoner and taking a more confessionalized approach, focused on the interests

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of the Huguenot movement. This paper aims to trace this shift and describe the new kind of discourse employed in Condé's texts, while explaining the possible reasons why this change occurred.

Keywords: France, Wars of Religion, Sixteenth Century, Huguenots, Condé