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In My End is My Beginning: Mary Stuart and the Foundation of Her Religious Pragmatism

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IN MY END IS MY BEGINNING:
MARY STUART AND THE FOUNDATION OF HER RELIGIOUS PRAGMATISM

by

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ABSTRACT

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots and Dowager Queen of France, demonstrated atypical religious tolerance during the turmoil of the sixteenth-century reformations, particularly in comparison to other monarchs of the time. This research especially focuses on her upbringing in France, and how her education and those around her influenced the pragmatism and actions displayed as a monarch in Scotland until July 1565. Her youth in France and religious tolerance is a rare focus in secondary sources compared to the more dramatic events in her later life.

DEDICATION

For Manolo, the hero of the people, and Ava, the only one who didn’t think so.
And for Ludovic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland and Dowager Queen of France, has been studied relentlessly throughout the centuries since her death. This fascination has led to a great many historiographies and evaluations of her abilities, choices, and proposed innocence or guilt of the crimes she was accused.[1] However, the scholarship we have to this point focuses primarily on the later years of her life, after her return to Scotland and eventual captivity in England.[2] Few sources study her character as a monarch and even fewer look at her time in France; arguably the most important of her life, as she spent thirteen formative years there.

Her time in the court of France, the "most glamourous and decadent court in Europe", was set against a backdrop of major societal change.[3] To be a monarch in the sixteenth century was to deal with religious strife in one's nation due to the ongoing influence of the reformations. The difference between Mary and other monarchs of the time is vast: she grew up outside of her home country, was tutored in French Renaissance humanism, and influenced heavily by Catherine de Medici and others in the French court, which developed in her an unusual tolerance for the time. Whereas

[1] For some excellent biographies on Mary Stuart, see: Gordon Donaldson, *Mary, Queen of Scots,* (English Universities Press, 1974). Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, (Westminster: Random House Publishing Group, 2014). John Guy, *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005). Jane T. Stoddart, T*he Girlhood of Mary Queen of Scots from Her Landing in France in August 1548 to Her Departure from France in August 1561*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908).

[2] For works studied that focus mostly on Mary's later years: James Mackay, *In My End Is My Beginning: A Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, (Mainstream, 2012). Kristen Post Walton, *Catholic Queen, Protestant Patriarchy Mary Queen of Scots and the Politics of Gender and Religion*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007). Jenny Wormald, *Mary, Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, (Havertown: Birlinn, Limited, 2017). Most biographies of the queen also focus on the later years, however they do include varying amounts of coverage on her youth, without analysis on how this affected her later choices.

[3] Dunn, Jane. *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005, 103.

some rulers might attempt to enforce their own religious preference, France practiced a more lenient approach that Mary took to heart. Though she held fast to her Catholic faith throughout her life and hoped to see it restored, both in her Scottish homeland as well as in England, she did not fault those of the Protestant religion and even made attempts to learn and understand it.[4]

Due to the ongoing fascination with Mary Stuart over the years, there has been a significant amount of scholarship from which we can benefit to better understand her life. However, much of these studies are preoccupied with the portions of her life that overlapped with the stories of another powerful female ruler, her cousin Elizabeth I of England. Works such as *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* view Mary through her relationship to Elizabeth I and are more interested in her captivity and the conspiracies surrounding her eventual execution.[5] It is the many events of her later life that dominate the discussion of her story. Yet just as Mary saw her youth as the happiest time of her life, it is a time that we must also consider as shaping the course of her life and decisions.

Despite her remarkable personal tolerance and pragmatic form of governance, the outcome of Mary's life (and how scholars tend to view her personally) colors how the rest of her story is told, as if the ending were a foregone conclusion. Because of this fatalist view, how her character was forged and the education she received amounts to little more than historical window dressing. Works like James Mackay's *In My End Is My*

[4] Maxwell-Scott, Mary Monica, and Dominique Bourgoing. *The Tragedy of Fotheringay Founded on the Journal of D. Bourgoing, Physician to Mary Queen of Scots, and on Unpublished Ms. Documents*. Project Gutenberg, 2017, 184.
[5] Dunn, Jane. *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.

Beginning: a Life of Mary Queen of Scots almost seem to tell the story of her life in reverse, as her end infiltrates any discussion of her character.[6] Yet it was not her captivity or untimely end that shaped her character, but rather her youth spent in France, being counseled by the Guise family, her mother-in-law Catherine de Medici, and a French humanist education designed to prepare her to rule two countries. *Queenship in Early Modern Europe* lays an excellent groundwork with which to understand what it means to be a queen at this time, exploring the new frontier (for the time) of women as heads of state, which could easily have come to pass if it were not interrupted by the death of Francis II.[7]

While each contemporary and scholar has their own leanings, most depictions of Mary agree on one thing: she was unusually tolerant in her approach to religion. While possibly a calculated stance for a queen during the Reformation, especially one to whom religion would always be an important part of her life, it is certainly progressive for the time. When this tolerance, or pragmatism, is mentioned in general scholarship, however, it is usually mentioned in a single sentence within a much broader discussion of her life and the author does not further explore it. These sentiments range from "she…never became an avenging scourge of heretics"[8] by authors that seem biased against the monarch to the flowering sentiment that she "[possessed] a sense of religious tolerance that was beyond the grasp of her contemporaries".[9] I believe that it can be argued that this tolerance underpins a greater understanding of her character as

[6] Mackay, James. *In My End Is My Beginning: A Life of Mary Queen of Scots*. Mainstream, 2012.
[7] Matheson-Pollock, Helen, Joanne Paul, and Catherine Fletcher. *Queenship and Counsel in Early Modern Europe*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
[8] Dunn, *Elizabeth and Mary*, 96.
[9] Mackay, *In My End Is My Beginning*, 8.

a monarch and is representative of her extensive education and little credited political savvy.

This thesis will first start with an explanation of the context and background to Mary's rule, particularly in regards to Scotland, France, and England. The significance of the religious reformations in Europe cannot be overstated, and therefore must play an important role in our understanding of these rulers and how they treated their subjects when it came to matters of religious freedom. This comes more clearly into focus when compared to other contemporary rulers, such as the Tudor monarchs of England, under whose rule a great many Christians would be put to death for confessing a faith that did not align with their sovereign.

In the second chapter, the topic of her education and the key influences from the years she spent in the French court as it relates to the religious pragmatism and personal tolerance she developed there will be covered. In the third, I will endeavor to reveal how her education and the influences of her youth were manifested in her time ruling Scotland, and how they proved to be an essential part of her successful return from France after thirteen years away from her homeland, in addition to showing examples of her tolerance in practice. In total, I seek to prove that Mary Stuart's childhood years and education in France deserve greater study as they played a major role in shaping the religious tolerance she would demonstrate as queen of Scotland. While I intend to provide careful examination of her youth and education, there are limits to the extent that we can fully understand any historical figure's perspective. However, I have found that contemporary accounts indicate Mary to be an unusually tolerant

person with regards to religion, especially for a devout Catholic monarch during the time of sixteenth century religious reformations.

As a note, the spelling of names can vary between sources for the same person. I will be using Stuart (the French) instead of Stewart, though they are often used interchangeably. Additionally, there are many variations of the Protestant faith that developed during the sixteenth century. The variations of particular relevance to this thesis are Calvinism within Scotland, the Church of England in its namesake of England, and in France, those who followed the Protestant faith were called Huguenots. However, I will use the general term of Protestant for ease of understanding. Catholicism, as it is the same confessional faith, will stand for just that.

CHAPTER ONE

Religion is generally a private matter today: differing belief systems are more or less accepted within the same communities, people choose their religion (or lack of) for themselves, and Protestantism and Catholicism are both equal forms of Christianity – neither is better than the other. However, in the sixteenth century, this could not have been further from the truth. For much of the later Middle Ages, many European Christians had been united under the papacy: the Roman Catholic Church. Personal faith was also something of a misnomer; religion was an indispensable aspect of everyday life and most people in the same area shared the same beliefs.[10] This was especially true for those subject to a monarchy; they were to believe as their leader did, at least outwardly, or suffer the consequences.

However, in rare instances, a monarch would allow those they ruled to believe as their conscience dictated, within the Christian limitation. Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was one of those few rulers who allowed this. Though she was a devout Catholic herself, her youth spent in France and the education she received there influenced her to become a pragmatic and, to an extent, tolerant leader – quite at odds with many of her contemporaries. As opposed to her later, more tumultuous years, this period of her history is rarely studied, though it bears closer examination due to the underpinning it provided her character, and the general assumption that rulers of the time were staunch, intolerant people, providing a refreshed view of the period and those in power.

[10] Eire, Carlos M. N. *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, 20.

Religion and the Sixteenth Century

Faith was not a personal matter, though it was a part of a person's daily life and affected one on an inter-personal basis. The church was how people worshipped together, related to one another, and connected the lower to higher class – they all believed in the same God. Catholic parish churches provided community support, education, and a meeting place for the people living there; it was a village's "main public space" and integral to the community, meaning that the religion it represented was too.[11] However, with something so important, which undergirded the daily life of each person within its bounds, the beliefs held could reach unfortunate heights. On a small scale, a perceived lack of piety in someone could lead to accusations of heresy, imprisonment, or even death. This person could be accused of sorcery (a punishable offense) if there was suspicion that they caused someone else's misfortune, ranging from creating storms to damage a crop, illness, or death. For protection against these acts or to heal after it happened, one might lean on prayer, relics, or church rituals that were seen as imbued with power. People clung to their faith as a way to explain or buoy them through difficult situations[12]. However, the permeation of this Catholic faith throughout society did not mean that people could not see its flaws.

Calls for reform did not start with the hope of splintering the church. Indeed, it had been going on long before Martin Luther "nailed" his *95 Theses* to a church door in

[11] Holt, Mack P. *Renaissance and Reformation France, 1500-1648*. The Short Oxford History of France. Oxford University Press, 2002, 33.
[12] Ibid, 37.

1517, but his story serves a convenient starting point.[13] Intended to spark debate among other clerics, the theses covered topics that he perceived as abuses within the church, particularly from those in the upper levels of its hierarchy. These included practices such as indulgences, an item that could be purchased from the church for "time off" an individual's sentence of purgatory after death. These were seen by the early reformers of the church as particularly egregious abuses of the faithful. Indulgences could be bought after a person had sinned, in advance as a "just in case", or even for a person who had already passed away. These funds were supposed to be used for the Church, however financial infidelity lead priests, who should have been living a chaste life, to use church money to fund the housing of mistresses and illegitimate children, as well as enriching their own status. Though any movement needs propaganda, the abuse of power was not complete. Wealth and other nodes of power for clergy generally depended on where their parish was. For example, a more rural parish priest may have been less educated with less power than a priest whose parish was in an affluent urban area.[14]

In addition to the abuses of power seen, some contested the interpretation of scriptures that had been accepted to that point, such as transubstantiation. This belief held that wine and bread ingested during Holy Communion literally became the blood and body of Jesus Christ.[15] There were multiple forms of the new Protestant faith developing at the time, such as Calvinism, Lutheranism, and others, each with their own

[13] Eire, *Reformations*, 149.
[14] Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 120.
[15] Ibid, 124.

interpretations, but many felt this was metaphorical to varying extents. This was not a literal change; the imbiber was consuming wine and bread, but by completing the sacramental act the blessing of God came through.[16] It may sound like semantics, but at the time it was incredibly controversial. Most of the base tenets of Catholicism had been held for hundreds of years, coming from the Bible or the word of God according to believers. For a fact like that to be questioned could be akin to heresy.

Another key division between the confessional faiths was the foundation for salvation of the soul. Catholics believed that good works were necessary for salvation after death, by completing such acts as tithing or charitable work. However, Protestants felt that simply having faith was enough. Good works would not ensure salvation if there was no faith fueling the actions and further, if one truly believed, then the good works would naturally follow.[17] These thoughts naturally led to a difference in authority: if only faith was necessary, then there was no worldly leader, only God. The Catholic church, on the other hand, believed that the pope had inherited his authority by virtue of his connection to Saint Peter, the first Bishop of Rome.[18] As such, he represented a worldly leader who could inform what those good works would entail.

Protestantism also believed that the Bible should be accessible to everyone. Historically, the Vulgate, or Catholic Bible, was written in Latin, but literacy was not at its highest level during the period and Latin was a language mostly learned by those who could afford to. However, this was one belief not distinct to the new faith. French

[16] Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 143 and Eire, *Reformations*, 234.
[17] Kaufmann, Thomas. *The Saved and the Damned: A History of the Reformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2023, 83.
[18] Matthew 16:18-19 RSV.

Catholicism saw Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples translate multiple portions of the Bible into French so that it was accessible to all levels of society.[19]

These differences, being so fundamental to each confessional faith (Protestant or Catholic), caused Latin Christendom to splinter with Protestantism becoming a heretical belief to those who still held to Catholicism. This new confessional faith was seen as a challenge to the long-held authority of the Catholic Church and with restriction of the new faith came anger from those who had converted, and eventually action. Few countries were untouched by the religious reforms, even if a kingdom retained its official state religion. While France officially stayed Catholic, events such as the Affair of the Placards show just how deadly this splintering could be. On October 18, 1534, Francis I woke to find posters not only in cities across France, but even his own room denouncing Catholicism, those who supported it, and multiple elements of the faith.[20] A mass execution was held in Paris to punish those who participated, while those who could, fled the country. The king even created a court to root out heresy that went so far with its authority that it would be called the "Burning Court".[21]

To be a monarch in sixteenth century Western Europe meant determining the kingdom's religion as well. Phrases such as *cuius regio, eius religio* (whoever rules the country determines its religion) in Latin,[22] and in French *un roi, une loi, une foi* (one king, one law, one faith) reinforce this standard.[23] Perhaps the best example is in England, where the official faith changed four times in as many reigns due to the

[19] Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 135.
[20] Eire, *Reformations*, 290.
[21] Ibid, 535.
[22] Kaufmann, *The Saved and the Damned*, 179.
[23] Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 21.

personal preference of the established or incoming ruler. Henry VIII began his reign as a Catholic monarch in 1509, shortly after marrying Catherine of Aragon, whose mother Queen Isabella of Castille and Aragon, was a champion of the Catholic Church through her own Crusades. Henry himself was a devoted Catholic, at least pragmatically, and in 1521 Pope Leo X awarded the king with the title "Defender of the Faith".[24] This title was a reward for Henry's writing in opposition of Martin Luther's reformation beliefs and defending the pope's place as head of the church.

Ironically, just ten years later in 1531, Henry VIII made an official break from Rome when he established himself as head of the Church of England.[25] In part, this change was the result of his "great matter" – the perceived need of a male heir which Catherine had not been able to supply.[26] Thus, when he formed the Protestant Church of England, it allowed him the freedom to marry Anne Boleyn, who was a supporter of the Protestant reforms. The two coincided perfectly for Henry's wants and needs, giving him more power and the ability to seek out a male-producing womb.

Henry is just one English monarch that changed the state's religion based on their preference, whether personal or practical, and the tradition carried on through Henry's children: Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I. Raised in the Protestant faith after the split from Rome, Edward VI's reign saw the progression of the faith in England, publishing the Book of Common Prayer in English, seeing retained rituals either removed or revised, and setting forth Acts of Uniformity more in line with the reformed

[24] Guy, John, and Julia Fox. *Hunting the Falcon: Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and the Marriage That Shook Europe*. 1st ed. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2023, 93.
[25] Eire, *Reformations*, 324.
[26] Ibid, 323.

faith.[27] Mary I, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon and Henry, was raised Catholic and continued to practice her faith even though such actions were outlawed by her brother. When she came to the throne in 1553, she reinstated Catholicism. This back and forth ended with Elizabeth I's rule in 1558. Raised in the same reformed faith as Edward VI, she reverted the state religion from Catholicism to match her own. England, after four monarchs and as many faith changes, would be Protestant ever after.

While Henry VIII may have chosen what he believed to be a very practical course of action, his decision came at a time of religious wars between the new Christian factions with people's souls (or at the very least their benefices) hanging in the balance. People's convictions pushed them apart until those who were not of the same confessional faith were convinced the other side were heretics. This intense split between the members of the Christian faith was not the initial intention of religious reformers, but because of the intensity of these beliefs, and the divisiveness they caused, it turned much to war. A new time of religious intolerance began – between members of the same overarching faith.

The flux of religion and challenges of ruling a people in opposition to each other reached throughout Europe. Scotland, a decentralized country ruled by a monarchy, also went through this, though with very different leadership choices and a much less violent outcome.

[27] Eire, *Reformations*, 329.

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

Mary Stuart was born December 8th, 1542, at Linlithgow Palace in Scotland, and was the only direct heir to the Scottish throne, an anomaly considering the heavy want of male heirs in most kingdoms. James V, King of Scots and Mary's father, had been married previously, though the bride, Princess Madeleine of Valois, died shortly after arriving in Scotland. Within a year of that death, James would marry Marie de Guise, a marriage which produced two boys, each of whom died in childhood and predeceased their sister, Mary. Because of the lack of legitimate male heirs, when Mary's father died, she became Queen of Scots at just six days old, with many grappling for the power that came with a ruler in their minority.

Scotland was used to ruling with both a king and regent for many years on end; in fact, Mary's six-day old queenship was not all that unusual for the kingdom. Aside from James IV, Mary's grandfather, and the only king to have ruled without a regency, each James since the first came to the throne at ages varying from less than a year old to twelve. James V came to the throne at just seventeen months old. Due to their youth, the government would set up a regency, with different factions vying for the most power, and eventually the king would take full power when they reached their majority. Considering the last hundred and fifty years of history, it almost would have been unusual to simply have a king on Scotland's throne.

Mary's mother, Marie de Guise, came from the powerful Guise family in France, while her father was the son of Margaret Tudor and James IV, King of Scots. Margaret Tudor was the sister of Henry VIII, King of England, and part of the much storied,

though relatively short-lived, House of Tudor. She came to be Queen of Scots through a treaty between England and Scotland which hoped to end the cycle of wars between the two kingdoms.[28] The treaty would eventually prove to be ineffectual, but it is this Tudor connection that gave Mary Stuart her claim to the English throne.

England was often engaging in some type of aggression with nearby kingdoms, and as far back as 1295 Scotland and France sought out each other's assistance. The Scots and French formed a treaty known as the *auld alliance*, agreeing to provide each other with protection against the English, should it be needed.[29] By marrying two French women in quick succession, James V had further solidified this, as in this era marriage was what sealed alliances.[30] Because of this, the eventual actions and French-leanings of Marie de Guise and Mary Stuart could be seen as simply continuing James V's wishes from before his death.

Scotland was also in the midst of religious change when Mary was born, much like the rest of Western Europe. Dissatisfaction with the church and their abuses of power, particularly in financial ways,[31] led people to explore other manners of faith and Protestant literature seeped into the kingdom, reaching all levels of society.[32] Ultimately, the kingdom would only remain Catholic until 1560, when the official faith was changed against Mary's wishes.

The push and pull between Protestant and Catholic factions also led to some favoring an alliance with England, rather than a continuation of the *auld alliance* with the

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[28] Eire, *Reformations*, 357.
[29] Donaldson, Gordon. *Mary, Queen of Scots.* English Universities Press, 1974, 10.
[30] Guy, John. *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005, 17.
[31] Ryrie, Alec. *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*. Manchester University Press, 2010, 14.
[32] Eire, *Reformations*, 357.

French, as England was the picture of a Protestant kingdom. Henry VIII, now head of the Protestant Church of England in addition to monarch, wished to bring Scotland under his rule, and marrying his son, the future Edward VI, to Mary would bond the two nations should there be heirs.[33] Because of these reasons which certainly overlapped, the Earl of Arran, having become the regent for Mary, worked with the English king towards this end, establishing the Treaty of Greenwich.[34]

Ultimately, this treaty was yet another in the folio of English-Scottish diplomatic failures. Arran eventually failed thanks to the doubt sown with the English ambassador, Ralph Sadler, by Marie de Guise.[35] His regency terms were adjusted, now having to share his position with Cardinal Beaton, a member of the pro-French and anti-Protestant faction, therefore an inevitable ally of Marie's.[36] Pushed to the point of backing out of the treaty, Henry VIII retaliated by sending troops to commence assault on Scottish borderlands, often referred to as the beginning of the "rough wooing".[37]

With Scottish blood and the kingdom's independence in the balance, the Scottish turned to their old allies, France. The Treaty of Haddington saw Mary betrothed to the French dauphin Francis, giving Scotland French troops and protection against England's attacks.[38] Scotland would seemingly stay independent while simultaneously being protected from the English anger of Henry VIII. However, this treaty also mandated that Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, would be sent to France immediately and

[33] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 20.
[34] Wormald, Jenny. *Mary, Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*. Havertown: Birlinn, Limited, 2017, 54.
[35] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 22.
[36] Ibid, 25.
[37] Ibid, 31.
[38] Wormald, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, 67.

so from the age of five, her education and upbringing would be French. This means that, while she could have ended up ruling in a myriad of fashions, her understanding of social, political, and religious matters would be heavily influenced by the culture of the French court and ultimately direct her actions.

CHAPTER TWO

Mary Stuart landed on French soil in August 1548, beginning a chapter that would last for just over thirteen years. This period would prove to be the most stable time of her life and the longest she would live anywhere, other than her time of captivity in England. Being just five years old when she left her native Scotland and not returning until she was almost nineteen, most of her development and education took place in the French court. Her language until this point had been Scots, and though she retained that knowledge, in short order her preferred language would become French. This formative time would leave an indelible mark on her personality, decision making, and religious convictions as a monarch later in life. It was also here in the French court that the foundation for her future religious tolerance would be sown. Despite the importance of this time in her development, little scholarship discusses Mary's tolerance with more than a sentence, if that, and even less examines her time in France in depth, particularly its influence in her eventual decisions as a monarch in Scotland, necessitating a deeper dive into the influences that formed one of the most well-known monarchs of the sixteenth century.[39]

[39] Some prominent works that generally spend little time studying the education of Mary, or her time in France: James Mackay, *In My End Is My Beginning: A Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, (Mainstream, 2012). Kristen Post Walton, *Catholic Queen, Protestant Patriarchy Mary Queen of Scots and the Politics of Gender and Religion*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007). Jenny Wormald, *Mary, Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, (Havertown: Birlinn, Limited, 2017).

Education

Mary arrived at the French court in the sixteenth century, when education was administered according to the popular Renaissance humanistic values. This school of thought had made its way from its origins in Italy (coincidentally also the birthplace of the current French queen, Catherine de Medici) and spread throughout Europe. The humanists emphasized the ancient forms they found in classical stories, poetry, philosophy, history, and other works and believed in studying the use of language and rhetorical style to achieve human progress by replicating the forms they found in the classical world. To be educated in these classics was considered "the best preparation for a career in…politics" due to its influence in speaking, writing, and arguing, all of which would be important for the higher classes, particularly royals.[40] In addition to the classical studies, religious instruction was a requirement and as such, the student would also receive education on the Christian scriptures, particularly in regards to the *ad fontes* principle.[41] Overall, a humanist education saw its students trained to learn how to benefit the public good and become changemakers in all areas of public life.

The public side of this education system still perpetuated the belief that women need not be educated, as they were not generally public figures and so schools were not setup to instruct girls. However, it was seen as beneficial to educate women of noble lineage to "demonstrate the greatness of your family, your religion and your state."[42]

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[40] Wiesner, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe: New Approaches to European History*. Fourth edition. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 171.
[41] Eire, *Reformations*, 90.
[42] Pollnitz, Aysha. *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain*. *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 204.

This would of course include the standard etiquette skills of the day, but also to have knowledge of literature, philosophy, and art. A well-rounded noblewoman would thus be able to think critically, demonstrate piety, and speak thoughtfully on matters of virtue and the public good.[43] Mary, as with the other women growing up in the French court, would have an education that enabled them to act as the intellectual counterparts to men and both sexes would be steeped in the ideals of French Renaissance humanism.

Shortly after her arrival in France, most of Mary's Scottish attendants were removed and replaced with French ones. This made it abundantly clear that her French education was to begin immediately and rid her of what the French considered the "barbarous" Scottish tongue.[44] At a young and impressionable age, she would be fully immersed in the language and mannerisms of her new home, though she still retained knowledge of her Scots heritage. In addition to learning the French language and customs, she would also be taught Latin and, later in her education, Greek, Italian, and Spanish. Though most monarchs in Europe would be taught multiple languages, aside from Scottish which Mary had learned prior to her arrival at French court, this particular linguistic combination is something that had been instituted by Louise of Savoy for her son Francis I's education and passed on to Henry II, Mary's future father-in-law.[45]

Mary's education, though possibly not as in-depth as other male rulers of the time, was certainly not short-changed because of her gender thanks to the beliefs of those in power in France at the time. The humanism of the French court included a

[43] Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 171.
[44] Fraser, Antonia. *Mary Queen of Scots*. Westminster: Random House Publishing Group, 2014, 43.
[45] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 67.

desire to indoctrinate women in its ideology, thus it was seen as a boon to educate daughters, especially those at court. Henry II and Catherine de Medici certainly took this to heart and the dauphin, the future Francis II, and Mary even shared tutors. This is seemingly confirmed when looking at the Latin exercises that survive from Mary's education. While only one letter to Francis survives from this time, there are a great many written to Elizabeth of Valois, her future sister-in-law and seemingly closest confidante. Notably, there is also only one letter written by Mary to another male student that was in her cohort.[46] Mary was clearly industrious when it came to writing letters to the other young nobility at court, so why is there such an obvious lack of letters to Francis? Presumably, this is due to the fact that, just like the male student in her class, they were present in the same lessons, and therefore having little reason to write to one another. Of course, the future couple would have been together in many other court settings as well, but the fact that they may have been educated together reinforces the higher level of education that Mary received in France compared to other courts, since male and female education were generally conducted differently and separately.

As much as humanism stressed the importance of women's education, sharing tutors or classrooms with a male student was not the norm outside of the French court. Elizabeth I of England grew up with a much watered-down version of the tutoring that her brother, Edward VI, received and they were not instructed together. While Edward focused on defending his faith through rhetoric, Elizabeth wrote letters and translated

[46] Mary, Queen of Scots, and A. J. Arbuthnot. *Queen Mary's Book; a Collection of Poems and Essays*. London, G. Bell, 1907, 48.

biblical works.[47] This inequality of their educational experience highlights how the values of the English court differed when it came to how women were to be educated. Though both Tudor children were strictly instructed in the Protestant faith, much like Mary was with Catholicism in France, the scholarship on sixteenth-century England shows us that the English monarchs had a far less accommodating view to those who believed differently.[48] The French Humanist influence, especially in the areas of rhetoric and philosophical thinking certainly played a part in shaping Mary's decisions during her future rule and how she chose to treat her subjects' confessional differences.

Though Elizabeth I and her contemporaries received a humanist education, it did not result in the same outcome as Mary Stuart's. Spain's Inquisition received authorization from the papacy to execute "even repentant [Protestants]".[49] England, taking it even further, executed almost twice the number Spain did from 1555 to 1564 and then used the period to "promote anti-Catholic sentiment", ignoring the number of Catholics that had been and would be executed.[50] Little talked about is the role that Elizabeth I played in the death of Catholics under her reign. The monarchy "meted out draconian punishments to those who did not attend Anglican worship or who supported Catholic priests," and one out of four priests that made it into England was put to

[47] Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain*, 243.
[48] General scholarship on England's actions during the reformations include Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Francis S. Betten, "The Tudor Queens: A Comparison", (*The Catholic Historical Review* 17, no. 2, 1931). Ole Peter Grell and Robert W. Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Thomas Kaufmann, *The Saved and the Damned: A History of the Reformation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2023).
[49] Grell, Ole Peter, and Robert W. Scribner. *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, 56.
[50] Ibid, 56-57.

death.[51] As shown, the sixteenth-century Western European monarch did not usually consider their subjects' confessional preferences outside France and Scotland.

While the rule of Edward VI and Elizabeth I in England demonstrated far less religious tolerance, this was not a subject that was intentionally taught as part of Mary's curriculum. By reading through her Latin exercises at the age of twelve, it is clear that she was already a devout Catholic, ready to challenge opposing beliefs. In a letter written to John Calvin, founder of the Calvinist branch of Protestantism, she chastised him for denying the existence of purgatory, a staple tenant of the Catholic faith. Whether the letter was sent or not is debated, but she states that his denial of the existence of purgatory is "to your ruin".[52] Her words leave little doubt as to how a young Mary regarded the teachings of Calvin.

Her book of Latin exercises was used to develop the Latin considered important to her humanist education, but it was also an avenue for her to practice the rhetoric and arguments that were deemed necessary for a successful prince. Her application of rhetoric in the letter to Calvin shows how readily she absorbed these lessons and the quality of her education, similar to the rhetoric that Edward VI spent his time on. Though it is hard to imagine any twelve-year-old, even a crowned queen amid the reformations, feeling strongly enough to write a letter such as this without prompting, these exercises would have been directed to some extent, though the words in her Latin exercises are more or less Mary's own.[53] Mary's faith never wavered from her Catholic upbringing, but

[51] Kaufmann, *The Saved and the Damned*, 187.
[52] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 54.
[53] Ibid, 42.

her education would play a key role in how she applied that faith to her style of governance.

Growing up in the Catholic professing French court, religious tolerance may not have been a specific goal of her instruction, but the works and authors that shaped Mary's curriculum were at least of that vein. Erasmus of Rotterdam became a staple of classrooms throughout humanist Europe, simultaneously instructing youth in Latin through essays and critiquing the established Catholic *status quo*. We know that Mary studied Erasmus as, among other works, his *Colloquies* are specifically mentioned in her exercises, which include his "most sarcastic and most damning indictments" of the church that he would publish.[54] Erasmus was a faithful Catholic who did not convert, yet still wrote on the need for reform.[55] Though he may have wished for a renewal, he is an example of the more balanced education that Mary received. When speaking about Luther's perceived extremes, Erasmus wrote "What I laid was a hen's egg; the bird Luther hatched was altogether different."[56]

Another tempering example of Erasmus mentioned by Mary is the character of Magdalia, from *Abbatis et Eruditae*, or "The Abbot and the Learned Lady" in exercise XXI. This essay by Erasmus contains a conversation between an abbot and Magdalia, who are initially discussing how her room should not hold any Greek and Latin works. The abbot is clearly against women having and gaining knowledge, stating that "it's not feminine to be brainy…[her] business is to have a good time".[57] The conversation takes

[54] Eire, *Reformations*, 111.
[55] Ibid, 107.
[56] Letter from Erasmus of Rotterdam to Philip Melanchthon, 1524, quoted in Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven, Yale University Press: 2016), p. 113.
[57] Erasmus, Desiderius, and Craig R. Thompson. *Colloquies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, 501.

a turn, with the heroine suggesting that all should live well, though it may look different to each person. Initially this may seem like an essay which simply promotes the value of women's education; however, it can also be read as emphasizing the need to allow each person to believe as they see best. That this same notion could be applied to confessional beliefs as well, particularly considering the author's own views, demonstrates a possible early influence on Mary's decision to allow her subjects to choose their faith according to their own beliefs. This abbot even states of his meager lifestyle "it's what we're used to", referencing austere church traditions for an abbot or monk.[58] This adherence to tradition is not to be seen as a virtue.

In addition to the works of Erasmus, Mary also studied classical literature, including philosophers such as Cicero, Plato, and Plutarch, in keeping with a proper humanist education.[59] Though she knew they were Pagan and were not Christians, her mention of them proved she could see beyond differences of religion. Writing to the Princess Elizabeth sometime between December 11 and 20, 1554, she states "ancient pagan writers, though deprived of the knowledge of our faith, show greater wisdom than we do".[60] This already demonstrates a progression from the letter written to Calvin, where she condemned his differing beliefs outright. Mary's devotion to the Catholic faith is above reproach, but it is equally clear from her education that she was not a fanatic and developed far more open-minded views when it came to individual choices, practices, and beliefs than her cousins, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I of England.

[58] Erasmus, *Colloquies*, 502.
[59] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 70.
[60] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 75.

Influences

Much has been made of Mary's eventual actions as a monarch in Scotland and whether they were the result of her having a meek personality or that she lacked the desire to lead. The characterizations of her rule vary wildly depending on the author's perspective on her actions (and perceived inaction) as a queen. Antonia Fraser's biography *Mary Queen of Scots* tends to take the position that, at least in her youth, she was "trained to act in feminine obedience" which indicates a passive monarch, waiting for others to direct her.[61] On the other hand, in *Mary, Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*, Dr. Jenny Wormald takes a less forgiving look, believing that "[Mary] provides the unique spectacle of an adult reigning monarch who did not want to reign" intimating a much more active incompetence.[62] These two viewpoints are typical of the complex and polarizing nature of Mary as a monarch and a person, but at least some measure of the circumstances of her early education and later return to Scotland to rule must be taken into consideration for the choices she made. These assumptions about her true nature seem to ignore the influences of her formative years in France: not only did she receive a French Humanist education that was on par with that of the dauphin, but the influences of the people around her and the situations she encountered at court directly educated her – for better or worse. This education would ultimately guide her to a path of religious tolerance and a conviction that a good ruler ought not to force a confessional faith upon their subjects.

[61] Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 69.
[62] Wormald, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, 13.

Mary was stripped of almost any sort of Scottish accoutrements when she arrived on French soil. Quickly her language, accent, and mannerisms were influenced by the French courtiers and her nursery playmates, such as Elizabeth of Valois and Francis, who became a constant in her life. Her governess, Lady Fleming, was allowed to stay on, along with the "four Maries", that is Mary Seton, Beaton, Fleming, and Livingston, Mary's friends that traveled with her. Even though these friends were allowed to stay with her, they were for a time sent to a convent in Poissy in order to be educated in the French fashion.[63] Eventually, Scottish language, customs, and dress became "fancy dress" at best.[64] From then on, Mary would see France as her home and work to surround herself with it as much as possible throughout her life, even when she left it more than a decade later to return to Scotland.

Of all the influences on the young queen, one that would have one of the largest influences was the French language itself. Mary was so thoroughly steeped in French culture and education that, though it is shown that she could still speak Scots fluently before her departure for Scotland in 1561, in most instances she preferred to speak and write in French.[65] A will and inventory written in 1566 after the birth of her son James were written in French, both by the executor as well as any notes that were written in her own hand.[66] For many of her speeches, she would also prefer to write them in French, only translating them into English as she was speaking.[67] Her preference for the

[63] Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 43.
[64] Ibid, 54.
[65] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 111.
[66] Bannatyne, Club. *Inventaires De La Royne Descosse Douairiere De France: Catalogues of the Jewels, Dresses, Furniture, Books, and Paintings of Mary Queen of Scots: 1556-1569*. Edinburgh: [s.n.], 1863, XXXII.
[67] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 43.

French language was so strong that it would appear that, though she could speak English, she did not learn to write in it until sometime after 1568.[68]

French works on church reform also made their way into Mary's library, feasibly influencing her eventually evidenced tolerance. A review of the 1569 and 1578 catalog of books included in her library show more French reform literature included than might be expected for a devout Catholic.[69] An assumption could be made that these were collected by others, but due to their binding, the publication dates, and the lack of a royal library having been established in Scotland prior to her return from France, it should be presumed that these books "were collected by her and for her, and for her alone."[70] There are multiple books which either directly address the new faith or discusses reforms that the author felt should occur within Catholicism; *Bertram Upoun the Sacrament*, *Ane Ansuer to Ronsard*, *Pantagruell in Frenche*, *The Remonstrant of the Emprior Maid to the Paip*, *The Treatie of the Sacrament Be Petir Martir*, and *Harmanni Reformatio in Duo Volumina* are all examples of this genre, with some that could be but lack a description, such as *The First Buik of Noveau Christian*. Additionally, there is a copy of *The Magreit of the Quene of Navarre* included, which is a particularly interesting volume to find. Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, was the aunt of Henry II and, though she never converted, a vocal proponent of "evangelical religious renewal in France."[71] This book compiled Marguerite's writings into one after her death and featured both her personal works and those that touched on religious subjects. Though

[68] Bannatyne, *Inventaires De La Royne Descosse Douairiere De France*, XXXII.
[69] Sharman, Julian. *The Library of Mary Queen of Scots*. London, E. Stock, 1889.
[70] Ibid, 6.
[71] Broomhall, Susan. *Women and Power at the French Court, 1483-1563*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 266.

they would not have met, this is another instance of a powerful French woman influencing the young Mary. While the author of Mary's bibliographical collection states in various ways that "there is room for surprise at the present volume [being] in the hands of Mary Stuart", if this has to be said so many times perhaps it is no longer a surprise and in fact commonplace for Mary to have actively investigated and learned about the reformed faith during her time in France, and beyond.[72] This knowledge of reform doctrine directly influenced her willingness to work alongside those who confessed the Protestant faith, while still remaining faithful to the Roman Catholic church herself.

It is also no coincidence that in her exercises written to Elizabeth of Valois Mary felt the need to extoll the value of educating women. Unlike her cousin Elizabeth I, who never truly trusted Mary and consistently saw women pushed to the fray, her unusual upbringing and relation to the women she was surrounded by helped Mary develop a deep faith in women's relationships. While she would certainly have had contact with men of great power and influence at court, like her uncle, the Cardinal of Lorraine, and her father-in-law Henry II, she was also in the presence of women who wielded power both directly and otherwise. For example, Henry II's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, felt comfortable enough in her own power to indicate that she and the king's wishes were as one, employing the phrase "the king and I" in her letters.[73] Seeing such a powerful female figure at court would make an impression on the young queen, but Diane was not the only powerful woman who played a central role in Mary's life.

[72] Sharman, *The Library of Mary Queen of Scots*, 82.
[73] Broomhall, *Women and Power at the French Court, 1483-1563*, 335.

Marie de Guise, though far removed from her daughter, worked as Mary's regent in Scotland in an official capacity – a right that Catherine de Medici could not be granted due to Salic Law in France when she acted as regent for her husband Henry and eventually her sons. Marie, though not trained in politics specifically, rose to the challenge when her daughter was just six days old and managed to hold onto the queen's person and the Scottish throne for her throughout her life. Mary trusted her mother's ability to rule so much that she would send blank sheets pre-signed "MARIE" for use in state business.[74] While Marie de Guise was her mother, Mary had not spent much time with her since she left France when she was only five years old, so such blind faith in another person is still remarkable.

Perhaps the most important influence of all was Catherine de Medici, Queen Consort of France to Henry II. Though initially lacking heirs, ten years after marrying she gave birth to Francis, the future Francis II, followed by nine additional children.[75] Before her husband's death, Catherine's importance steadily rose, eventually serving as regent multiple times during Henry's reign. It was during these times as acting regent that she was forced to work with different factions in the court who were both for and opposed to her husband's policies, and in some cases to Catholicism as well, which was the state religion.[76] It is likely that Mary's choices to work with both Catholic and Protestant voices in the Scottish court were directly influenced by her experience watching Catherine

[74] Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 60.
[75] Frieda, Leonie. *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006, XIV.
[76] Ibid, 108.

manage similar challenges in France, along with Catherine's later actions and challenges.

Outside of serving as regent, Catherine was also heavily involved in the education of her children and Mary, as well as the operation of the nursery household. She would give instruction over the smallest details, such as requesting that the dauphin be made to blow his nose more often to help his ill health.[77] The level of involvement exhibited by Catherine in particular was unusual for the time, particularly considering the abundant level of household staff that the children enjoyed and the status of their parents at court. This attention from Catherine is something she would only have received in France at this time.

Given Catherine's involvement in seeing to the education and care provided to her children, as well as to Mary, it should come as no surprise that Mary mentions meeting with the queen even in her Latin exercises. The first mention comes of a discussion in exercise IX, in which Catherine spoke to the children instructing them "to do whatever our teachers may require of us", showing her involvement in their education.[78] Following this, there are three additional mentions of Mary spending time with the queen, whether she had been with Catherine in the her apartments,[79] asked if she could visit Elizabeth,[80] or were at vespers together.[81]

These examples are simply the times that Mary specifically mentioned being in company with the queen, which presumably would have been more often, especially

[77] Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 65.
[78] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 47.
[79] Ibid, 54.
[80] Ibid, 66.
[81] Ibid, 68.

considering that the pair shared a number of passions which would inevitably find them together. It was this companionship that allowed Mary to see Catherine privately to consult on matters of state before meetings, which does hinder the ability to document since they may not have written about them explicitly. There is an example of their obviously having conferred before an interview with the English diplomat Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, though. Catherine, after stating that France would be a friend to England, looked to Mary for her to confirm, which she did after the prompt, an obvious sign that they would have discussed this in advance.[82] Mary also addressed these conferences in a letter, telling her uncle that the “queen [mother] herself had counselled me this”.[83] Rather than seeing this powerful woman as a rival, Mary would develop a strong bond with Catherine during her time in France. This bond would continue throughout her life, with Mary signing her letters to Catherine as simply “Marie” rather than “Marie R" or “M R”.[84] In signing letters, Mary would rarely remove the R, which stood for Regina, a reminder to the recipient of her status. When it was removed, it was only for those she was particularly close to. In contrast, she typically signed letters to other heads of state, like her cousin Elizabeth I, as Marie R.[85]

There is debate over the extent to which Mary was aware of the religious difficulties caused by the Reformation in France before becoming Queen of France, but

[82] Paranque, Estelle. *Blood, Fire and Gold: The Story of Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici*. New York: Hachette Books, 2022, 81.
[83] Mary, Queen of Scots and John Hungerford Pollen. *A Letter from Mary Queen of Scots to the Duke of Guise, January 1562*. Edinburgh, Printed by T. and A. Constable, for the Scottish History Society, 1904, 22.
[84] Mary, Queen of Scots, and Agnes Strickland. *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Documents Connected with Her Personal History, Volume III*. London, H. Colburn, 1843, 39.
[85] Mary, Queen of Scots, and Agnes Strickland. *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Documents Connected with Her Personal History, Volume I*. London, H. Colburn, 1842, 62.

considering the letter drafted to John Calvin as part of a schoolroom exercise, she more than likely would have known at least some of what was happening in the country. What is more certain is that after being crowned in 1560, this absolutely changed. While the court was stationed at Amboise, and in order to wrest Francis II (and France by extension) from control of the Guises, a Huguenot plot was hatched to take the king's person and set up a new regency under his Bourbon relatives. Relatives that were, if not outright Huguenots, then at least much more sympathetic to their cause than the Catholic Guises. The plan failed, in part due to the fortress-like quality of the Amboise château, and resulted in the execution of more than twelve hundred people.[86] While accounts vary as to whether she actually witnessed the executions, we know that Mary was disturbed by the scene.[87] In the aftermath of these executions though, there was an order to "release all religious prisoners and [allow] dissenters to present…petitions and remonstrances", which is widely attributed to the urging of Catherine de Medici.[88]

Although I believe that she would have understood that these were "rebels", the Huguenot plot and its consequences would have driven home just how precarious the religious situation could become and how dire its consequences. Further, based on her education and belief that a good prince would not try to force their subjects to adopt a religion based solely on royal proclamation, my argument is that this experience played a part in her reluctance to engage in dramatic acts in order to place one confessional faith above another. Her desire to avoid similar religious persecution of her Scottish

[86] Mackay, *In My End Is My Beginning*, 92.
[87] Paranque, *Blood, Fire, and Gold*, 83.
[88] Knecht, R. J. *The French Wars of Religion, 1559-1598*. 3rd ed. Harlow, England; Longman, 2010, 26.

subjects like the one at Amboise contributed to her pragmatism, but what I contend separates her from her contemporaries was her willingness to learn about and consider other viewpoints. She would never waver in her personal faith, seeking always to practice the rituals of her chosen confessional faith, but both her words and deeds reveal a remarkable degree of religious tolerance. This is best demonstrated by her queenship and how she ultimately governed in her homeland, after the death of Francis II in December 1560.

CHAPTER THREE

It is clear that, even as a woman, because of her royal birth, Mary benefitted from a French Renaissance education. However, the full impact of how much this shaped her style of governance and personal life would only become apparent once she returned to Scotland after the death of Francis II. The greatest evidence of the French influence and her religious pragmatism is seen when Mary was able to rule in her own right. Now, she could appoint her own council, rule without the filter of a regent, and make her own decisions as a crowned queen, rather than a queen consort, which came with limited, if any, actual power for effecting change.

Governance Pragmatism

Mary's pragmatism in governing her subjects with regards to religion began to show even before she reached Scotland. At a dinner shortly before leaving France with Throckmorton, the English ambassador, and Catherine de Medici, her mother-in-law and acting regent of France, the topic turned to religious beliefs when he pressed the ratification of the Treaty of Edinburgh, to which Mary had not agreed. The treaty was of particular importance to Elizabeth I as it would establish her as the rightful queen of England, removing Mary as a direct and immediate threat to her rule. The treaty had already been approved by the Estates in Scotland during Mary's absence, in part assisted by England's efforts and support for the Scottish rebels to turn the country to

Protestantism. A Catholic queen in nearby Scotland with a claim to the English throne presented a great threat to Elizabeth as Catholic factions and the Papacy would certainly prefer Mary. Throckmorton, in seeking Mary's support for the treaty, pressed upon her how much Scotland had changed during the time she was in France. He warned her that Scotland had enjoyed peace until Marie de Guise "began to constrain men's consciences", by which he meant she was unaccepting of her subjects' preference for the Protestant faith.[89]

Mary Stuart was a staunch French Catholic and her uncle a high-ranking Cardinal, but would she seek to enforce those beliefs on her subjects as queen? Peace between England, France, and Scotland all depended on her choice, but when pressed regarding her feelings on the flourishing Protestant faith in Scotland, Mary stated that "though there is a greater number of a contrary religion than I desire… I do not wish to constrain the faith of any of my subjects".[90] However, while she would be tolerant of her subject's differing faith, she herself would remain a devout Catholic, stating "Constancy does become all folks well, but none better than princes".[91] These words for her reasoning not to abandon her Catholic faith is no coincidence – it directly reflects the teachings of Erasmus from *The Education of a Christian Prince*, a work she most likely would have studied as part of her French Humanist education. In the section "Epithets of a Good Prince", in which Erasmus lists the qualities of a praiseworthy ruler, he instructs that

[89] Paranque, *Blood, Fire, and Gold*, 100.
[90] Letter from Throckmorton to Elizabeth I, June 23 1561, quoted in Estelle Paranque, *Blood, Fire & Gold* (New York, Hachette Books: 2022), p. 101.
[91] Paranque, *Blood, Fire, and Gold*, 100.

"[the prince] is true, *constant*, unbending".[92] Mary would be just as constant in her personal faith while still acknowledging the necessity for her subjects to be allowed to choose their own path.

Although she is not given the same credit that Elizabeth I is in regards to evasion as a political tactic, Mary may have saved her country the heartache that France experienced during the Reformation by doing just that.[93] Before returning to Scotland, in a meeting with her brother the Earl of Moray, Mary confirmed that she would not overturn the wishes of her people, or more appropriately her nobles, in forcing a return to Catholicism as the official religion, leaving Scotland a Protestant country – mostly.[94] Throughout her personal rule, she continuously confirmed her support for the new religion, but never actually made a full proclamation of its authority. Though this could be seen as a way to avoid validating the change, when looking to France it is possible to see why she may have chosen to not act.

Catherine de Medici, as regent for Charles IX, issued the Edict of Saint-Germain shortly after Mary returned to Scotland, in January 1562. This provided rights for the Huguenots in France to perform religious services in specific circumstances, while still maintaining the Catholic *status quo*. This should have been a welcome compromise, but it instead led to bloodshed.[95] This backlash may have been the catalyst for Mary's avoidance of fully instating Protestantism.

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[92] Erasmus, Desiderius. *The Education of a Christian Prince.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1968. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb05991.0001.001. PDF, 171. (Emphasis mine).
[93] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 111.
[94] Ibid, 121.
[95] Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France*, 25.

Ultimately, the Scots would choose to become a Protestant nation, led by a Catholic queen, a rarity for that time. As a ruler Mary had chosen a policy guided by religious pragmatism and desired others in her government to do the same. In 1563, after Mary had been ruling in Scotland for two years, some Catholic priests had "erected up that idol, the Mass" and preached to the public.[96] This made them idolaters to the Protestants and punishable under the new Scottish law, which the queen found unacceptable. Summoning John Knox, a prominent Protestant leader, she "travailed with him earnestly…that he would be the instrument to persuade [people]…not to put hands to punish any man for the using of themselves in their religion as pleased them".[97] This sentiment is not dissimilar to a line from Mary's Latin exercises, that "a good prince is to injure no one, but to do good to all."[98] Though she was unsuccessful in convincing Knox to practice leniency, she was eventually able to have the "Papists" set free from prison.[99]

As a Catholic, it is not surprising that Mary would aid those of her own faith, but would she have offered the same leniency to her Protestant subjects if the roles were reversed? This question is harder to answer, as it is important to remember that though there are not any known examples of her having saved Protestants, she would not have had much of a chance to do so. The only time when Protestants under her rule were in the minority was when she was Queen Consort of France, a position with little direct power. By the time of her return to Scotland, the country was predominantly Protestant

[96] Knox, John. *History of the Reformation in Scotland, Edited by William Croft Dickinson Vol. 2*. New York (State): Philosophical Library, 1950, 70.
[97] Ibid, 71.
[98] Mary, *Queen of Scots, Queen Mary's Book*, 53.
[99] Knox, *History of the Reformation in Scotland Volume 2*, 84.

and had champions like the Scottish nobles and England to advocate for its well-being. What is known is that when writing to Michel de Castelnau in 1578 while in captivity in England, she expressed her wish to "bring England back to Catholicism, but not by force".[100] Six years earlier, the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre in France provided a stark reminder of the violence and bloodshed caused by religious intolerance. Mary's strong ties to France and the decisions of her mother-in-law were still influencing her belief in the necessity of religious co-existence and the need to not force religious change.

At only eighteen Mary faced significant challenges as a young queen, especially since she had been away from Scotland for so long and was, essentially, French. It was important to tread carefully, caught as she was between the nobles who controlled fighting power, money, and support the monarch needed, and the Protestantism-pushing Lords of Congregation, whose "role was about to change from that of near-autonomous governors to servants of a woman ruler".[101] However, the country was not, as a whole, fully committed to Protestantism; some people still actively practiced Catholicism and there were nobles that waited to see "which side shall have the victory"[102] during the time of fighting between those Lords and Marie de Guise's regency.[103] The tide changed once England stepped in though. As English forces arrived to back the Scottish rebels to the crown, loyal backers of the Guise regency and

[100] Lasry, George, Norbert Biermann, and Satoshi Tomokiyo. "Deciphering Mary Stuart's Lost Letters from 1578-1584." *Cryptologia* 47, no. 2 (2023): 101–202, 37.
[101] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 139.
[102] Richard Maitland quoted in Alec Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, (Manchester University Press: 2010), p. 169.
[103] Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, 169.

Catholicism fell away publicly and the religious matter, particularly once Marie was displaced, was settled. At that point, considering the already open issues with the Treaty of Edinburgh and lack of reinforcement she could send to assist, it is easy to see why Mary would have chosen a pragmatic approach when it came to religious differences in Scotland. Instead of behaving like a zealous Catholic that would seek vengeance on the rebel lords or the Protestant faith that had displaced her mother, when she named her Privy Council after her return more than half were Protestant, with some having been part of the work to displace her mother.[104] She showed herself to consider her own position, as well as that of her country, before her personal convictions – exactly what she was taught in France.

It is easy to see that she was pragmatic regarding matters of faith, however her character and the decisions she made in governance demonstrated far more than that. Even her critics, like William Maitland, who feared her Catholic ideals and stated that her return "shall not fail to raise wonderful tragedies" was won over. Later extolling her virtue he said, "I see in her a good towardness, and think the queen your sovereign shall be able to do much with her in religion, if they once enter in a good familiarity".[105]

The "good towardness" that Maitland recognized could easily have come from her French Humanist education. In the Latin exercise XVII, Mary speaks out regarding tyranny - somewhat ironically considering the accusations her later detractors lobbed at her. With the benefit of hindsight, one can find the early seeds of tolerance in what a

[104] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 138.
[105] Richard Maitland quoted in John Guy, *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin: 2005), p. 141-142.

good prince should never do: “[using] such phrases as: ‘I wish it to be thus! I command it so! and on every consideration, let my will be done!”[106] This instruction certainly admonishes a prince who would simply try to assert their own will or religious views when their kingdom wished for something different.

In total, it may have been better for her to have been more pragmatic towards religion, rather than embracing tolerance. If she had been willing to convert to Protestantism she would have encountered fewer difficulties practicing her faith and less obstinance from her overwhelmingly Protestant nobles. While preparing for her departure from France, her brother, James, Earl of Moray, came to speak to her in person regarding the Scottish government and its status, particularly regarding religion. After days of discussion, Mary agreed to uphold Protestantism as long as she was able to hear Mass at Holyroodhouse, one of her palaces in Scotland.[107] This may not seem like much of an obstacle, but James intended to *only* allow her to hear Mass here. When she attempted to attend at a different palace, he and the Earl of Argyll immediately stopped the preparations.[108] She would hear Mass at Holyroodhouse and nowhere else.

John Knox, the perniciously zealous Protestant preacher, may also have been less of a pain to Mary had she simply converted. Though it may seem that he did not hold much power as “just” a preacher, he had become the minister at “the most influential pulpit in the country”, St. Giles Kirk.[109] He was also appointed to councils and given

[106] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary’s Book*, 53.
[107] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 122.
[108] Ibid, 137.
[109] Ibid, 134.

responsibilities by the Lords of Congregation, showing that he had the trust of the nobles which would turn the tide of government in Scotland.[110] She would tell Throckmorton "that she believed him to be the most dangerous man in her kingdom," particularly true considering his hatred of her religion and gender.[111] In his work *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, he, of course, complains about any "monstre in nature" (or woman with power), but he takes it a step further in regard to pushing his Protestant ideals.[112] He specifically speaks to the "dutie" of people "to punishe vice…[such] as idolatrie, blasphemie,"[113] and as had been done in the past, "destroie…altars and images",[114] all of which were considered part of the heretical nature of Catholicism in Protestant eyes. Had Mary not been practicing this "heretical" religion he may have been more inclined to leniency. We see this in the way he "exempted [Elizabeth I] from his vicious attacks on female rulers," when the main difference she held was her confessed faith, the Protestant Church of England.[115]

Additionally, though Elizabeth waffled on naming her successor, she may have been more apt to name Mary as heir to the throne of England, as having a Protestant woman in the line of succession would be less of a threat. Why would a ruler who was merely pragmatic opt to take the more difficult path of confessing a faith that placed her at a potential disadvantage with her own council, or that limited her chances of being named heir to the English crown?

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[110] Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, 165.
[111] Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 153.
[112] Knox, John. *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Project Gutenberg, n.d., 50.
[113] Ibid, 34.
[114] Ibid, 50.
[115] Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 170.

Personal Tolerance

Yet she remained a devout Catholic until the very end of her life and if anything, she grew even more tolerant in her personal understanding of religious differences. In 1566, as she lay in what she presumed to be her deathbed after delivering her son, the future James VI and I, she gave a speech to the lords she had called to her at Jedburgh. In this address she requested that her son be raised "so that in later years he may reign as a Christian and virtuous prince", knowing full well that those around her were Protestant.[116] While it could be said that she may have meant Catholic and simply used Christian instead, this is proved false when in that same speech she specifically mentions Catholicism separately from Christianity. "I implore you…not to constrain those who profess the old Catholic faith," and believing she is close to death, feels that a person reconciling their faults "would never press them".[117] Mary chose her words carefully, knowing that her son would more than likely be raised Protestant regardless of what she wished personally, and so she wished that he simply be a good Christian.

Mary was certainly pragmatic in some ways, being smart enough to recognize what she could and could not change. She saw that she would not be able to both rule as a Catholic queen and still practice her faith if she were to deny the Lords of Congregation's wishes regarding the official religion of Scotland, and so she acquiesced. In Jedburgh, she believed to be dying and knew what those around her son would ultimately instill in him regarding religion without her input. However, personally,

[116] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 92.
[117] Ibid, 94.

she held strong to her faith, creating a middle path that allowed – almost – everyone to achieve their aims. In that same speech at Jedburgh, she asked the French ambassador, Monsieur du Croc, to relay a message to Charles IX, Catherine de Medici, and others that she left behind in France. In addition to asking for forgiveness of perceived faults and commending her son to them, she wished to "testify…that I die in the Catholic faith, in which I was educated".[118] She would not go without reassuring, particularly those that influenced her most in her youth, that the education she received and the religious values which had been instilled by the French court would be with her until the end.

Regardless of her personal conviction regarding the Catholic faith though, her tolerance is shown again in her personal life when, in 1616, James VI and I refers to his mother's feelings on religion. He states that she wrote to him many times on the subject, but never pushed him to convert. "For so that I led a good life…she doubted not but I would be in a good case with the profession of my owne Religion."[119] Though he was baptized by a "Popish Archbishop", she never tried to persuade him into changing from the Protestant faith unless "my owne Conscience forced mee to it".[120] Mary Stuart seemed to believe that her own son should be raised in such a way that, whatever faith he confessed, it was more important that he was a Christian prince as she learned from Erasmus' teachings during her own French education.

[118] Mary, Queen of Scots, *Queen Mary's Book*, 94-95.
[119] James I, and Charles Howard McIlwain. *The Political Works of James I*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918, 122.
[120] Ibid.

While the Reformation was taking place in many other European countries at the same time, France was one of the few countries which, like Scotland, attempted a more tolerant approach to religion. France still maintained an official confessional faith of Catholicism, but England, as mentioned switched official stances four times in as many rulers. This meant that depending on who was sitting on the throne, a person's chances of being executed for heresy would also change. Henry VIII began his reign as a Catholic monarch, changing towards the latter portion to assist in his "great matter" in 1531.[121] Both before and after this year he punished and put to death those who were considered heretics in his own kingdom – Protestants prior to 1531 and Catholics thereafter.

Mary I, unfortunately better known as "bloody Mary", came to the throne with the intention of restoring the Catholic faith she was raised in. The official number of heretics burned from her five-year reign varies based on the account but is generally accepted as around two-hundred and eighty-eight to three hundred.[122] While this seems like a large number it is, quite like her nickname, misleading. In reality, some of the executions included in Mary's count were actually put to death due to their participation in uprisings to restore Lady Jane Grey to the throne – revolts such as this being considered treason rather than heresy.[123] Elizabeth overall put more to death in her longer reign, but there were those in her kingdom that could be Catholic – if they could afford it.[124]

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[121] Eire, *Reformations*, 324.
[122] Betten, Francis S. "The Tudor Queens: A Comparison." *The Catholic Historical Review* 17, no. 2 (1931): 187–93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25012878, 190. Eire, *Reformations*, 335.
[123] Betten, "The Tudor Queens", 190.
[124] Dunn, *Elizabeth and Mary*, 286.

In France, both Francis I and Henry II persecuted heretics, even though the new faith had made its presence known in close circles. Francis I's sister was heavily interested in reform literature, and wrote on the topic, though it did not stop the king's persecution work. Henry II worked with people of different confessional faiths: multiple of his councilors converted to Protestantism,[125] or spoke in support of it,[126] but regardless, he still voraciously worked to "root out" the new faith. Once Catherine de Medici held direct power in the form of regency, however, she followed a much more moderate line, reinforcing the extent that Mary was influenced by her mother-in-law based own her own actions in Scotland.

Before she ever left France, Mary committed to a strategy that would not force any religion onto her subjects, attempt to build an amiable relationship with her cousin on the English throne, and establish internal peace for her homeland. In keeping with the French Humanist values she learned in her youth, she demonstrated her intelligence and pragmatism as a ruler, seeking to avoid the mistakes made by other European monarchs that resulted in religious persecution and death for their subjects. She agreed to uphold whatever confessional faith her kingdom would choose, whether Catholic or Protestant, even if it conflicted with her personal convictions. This belief in the importance of religious tolerance is demonstrated throughout her rule and beyond. When faced with the prospect of death after giving birth to her son, she chose a message of tolerance, advocating for a Christian upbringing befitting a prince rather

[125] Knecht, R. J. *French Renaissance Monarchy: Francis I and Henry II*. 2nd Ed. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996, 71.
[126] Ibid, 72.

than making her final wish for him to be raised Catholic. This was not due to any doubt on her part of her own confessional faith, but instead reflected her belief that everyone should be held accountable by their creator, rather than an earthly prince.

CONCLUSION

By any measure it is clear that Mary Stuart's time in France left its mark on her style of queenship and resulted in an unusual level of religious pragmatism, if not outright tolerance, for the time. When she returned to Scotland to rule in her own right, the French humanist and reformist literature she studied and brought back with her imprinted in her the belief that her divine right to rule had to be guided by virtue and what was good for her subjects, which to her meant permitting each person to live as they saw fit with regards to their chosen confessional faith. While these pivotal years of her life are often overlooked and she is not often credited for it, she was able to utilize this education to maneuver the difficulties of ruling a nation during, and divided by, the reformation.

Rather than ignoring her childhood years, as is most often the case when studying Mary Stuart, close attention should be paid to the important influences on her youth. Had she been brought up in Scotland she would not have had the benefits of a French Renaissance education and would not have been influenced by the French court, in particular Catherine de Medici. Mary's mother-in-law made sure that her education was provided for in the same manner that she did her own son. Her frequent mention in the young Stuart queen's letters, and the close bond they shared throughout her life, reveal how much her counsel and the example she set helped to provide a framework for Mary's choices as a ruler and personally. Mary's religious tolerance was further cultivated by the examples of governance she saw in France, while the women she witnessed wielding great power in the French court served to reinforce the belief she held of her status as queen.

As Helmut Puff posits, there is a tendency within the confessionalization paradigm to ignore the trees and assume the hegemony of the forest, noting "researchers need to cast light on how sixteenth-century believers actively forged their religious sensibilities".[127] In studying this period, the assumption is that each ruler forced their beliefs on their subjects and that lines hardened between confessional faiths, but this was not always the case. Each monarch made personal, deliberate choices based on their own education and experiences, however once a monarch chose a specific confession, "doing so intensified their religious agency in working toward a new confessional society and setting an example for others to follow."[128] The reformations were not a monolith – a ruler or a subject could choose a violent path forward or a more tolerant path, such as Mary did based on the education and influences she received in France.

It is due to the strength of her education and convictions, including her belief in her right to rule over but not constrain her subjects, that she was able to successfully return to Scotland as a Catholic queen. At this time, the power held by the Lords of Congregation and the shift towards the Protestant faith forced her to find her way on a delicate middle path. It was not apathy, as some have suggested, that led her to accept the new faith of her subjects, but her personal pragmatism and a desire to avoid seeing her subjects punished or put to death based on their confessional faith that led to her tolerance. Her years of training in rhetoric and princely education, along with the French

[127] Puff, Helmut. "Belief in the Reformation Era: Reflections on the State of Confessionalization." *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 46–52, 51.
[128] Ibid.

humanist dedication to the public good, provided the roadmap by which she was able to peacefully reign over the Protestant leaning lords and withstand the volleys from the firebrand preacher John Knox.

More importantly to Mary, while she hoped for a return to what she saw as the true faith, she would allow her subjects to choose their confessional faith according to their own conscience. While it may be difficult for our modern, generally more religiously tolerant time, to understand this balancing act, it clearly establishes her pragmatism. The confessionalization paradigm usually indicates that overt control and religious repression were the norm during the reformations, but Mary's example of tolerance proves the merits of closer study of the time. Mary's personal tolerance regarding matters of religion is revealed in the study of her own words, with her youth and education in France firmly establishing the foundation for her to become a uniquely tolerant ruler in the history of the Reformations in Western Europe.

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