CHAPTER 4

Among Catholics and Calvinists: Francesco Pucci in Late Sixteenth-Century France

1 A Calvinist in ligueur Paris?

Francesco Pucci entered the French capital in autumn 1591, when it was still occupied by the Catholic ligueurs. The city had been under siege since May 1588, when Henry de Guise disobeyed Henry III’s orders and marched his troops into Paris; the King of France could not tolerate the presence of rebels in the capital of his kingdom, a state within the state whose awkward presence threatened the very existence of the French monarchy. The King’s violent death at the hands of a friar, Jacques Clément, on 1 August 1589 in the park of Saint-Cloud just outside Paris had not upset the political balance, as Henry III had already named Henry de Bourbon as his successor, thereby authorizing the latter to succeed him formally on the French throne as Henry IV. On its part, the Catholic League wasted no time; instead of supporting the legitimacy of the new sovereign, it hastened to find a credible alternative, recognizing the old Cardinal of Bourbon as the only King of France under the name of Charles X. As France split into two notional political regions—one loyal to the new king and the other under the strong influence of the Catholic League—Henry IV never abandoned his plan to reconquer the capital and the monarchist troops laid siege to the city between April and August 1590. The result was a failure for the King, since Spanish military reinforcements in the pay of the Duke of Parma arrived on the scene, but the siege nevertheless left its mark. The people of Paris were greatly affected by the material restrictions that had been forced upon them and pinned their hopes on the comforting fervour of the ligueur preachers. Even after the end of the siege, they continued to incite the Parisians against Henry IV and did not hesitate to present the struggle with the invader as an apocalyptic battle against the Antichrist. By comparing any desire to surrender to a betrayal of divine will—therefore punishable by death—, the ligueur preachers paved the way for an escalation of radicalism and violence, which coincided precisely with the weeks of Pucci’s arrival in Paris. However, this radical phase was merely a brief parenthesis, for—as Pucci saw for himself—it soon gave way to a solemn liturgical and symbolic structure around which the ligueurs organized their solid hold on the capital,
guaranteeing that it remained occupied until Henry IV’s tormented conversion to Catholicism.¹

As we have seen, Pucci had left Prague a few months before and after a brief stay in Frankfurt, during which he composed his two letters to Gregory XIV and the latter’s Cardinal Nephew, he arrived in Paris with the secret intention of meeting Henry IV. Who had helped pave the way for his arrival in Paris? The first name that springs to mind is that of Guillaume d’Ancel, Henry of Navarre’s agent in Prague. The close bond between the two men² had not gone unnoticed in the Empire: Cesare Speciano wrote to Cinzio Aldobrandini, referring to Pucci’s *De Christi efficacitate*, a work d’Ancel helped circulate: “I hear that this man, a resident in the city, claims to be an agent of Navarre; he goes around presenting the book to many as a good work written by a Catholic.”³ It was therefore d’Ancel who put him in contact with the King of France’s entourage from Prague, awakening a hope that would never be fulfilled. Besides Henry IV’s agent in Prague, it is possible that Filippo Sega played a role of some importance in Pucci’s decision to go to Paris. Sega was an old acquaintance of his, in whose hands he had abjured a few years before; he was the former Nuncio in Prague and at the time the Nuncio in Paris. Pucci probably received

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² D’Ancel was the name suggested by Pucci when asked a few months later for an influential person who could supply further details concerning the doctrines that had been attacked by the Jesuits; see Pucci’s letter to Antonio Corazzano in Prague, 1592, in Firpo, *Scritti*, 136–137; P. Carta, *Nunziature ed eresia nel Cinquecento. Nuovi documenti sul processo e la condanna di Francesco Pucci (1592–1597)* (Padua, Cedam, 1999), 61. Pucci had dedicated to M. D’Ancel a short, unpublished Latin treatise entitled *De ratione probandorum spiritum, an ex Deo sint, et de sententia Chiliastarum approbando*, written during his stay in Prague between 1586 and 1589; for this lost writing, cf. Firpo, *Scritti*, 32.
³ Letter from Prague, December 1, 1592; P. Carta, *Nunziature ed eresia*, 73 and 146 ff.