MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE AND EVANGELICAL REFORM

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Car par eulx [François I and Charles V] [Dieu] veult que la foy confirmée
Soit, et aussy l'eglise reformée,
Et d’une part oustées les heresies,
De l’aultere aussy les vaines fantaisies,
Et que la foy nous face en toute guye
En triumphant triumphe la saincée Eglise.
(New Year’s Day Epistle, Marguerite to François I [c. January 1545])

I. Marguerite: Actor and Author in the Reformation

Throughout her career as a prominent member of court, Marguerite kept urging major powers—her brother François I, his son Henri II, Henry VIII of England, Pope Paul III, reforming bishops, and Protestant princes and theologians—to effect “la reformation de l’eglise,” to “reformer et conserver la Christienté.” As an actor in the Reformation conflict, she mounted a series of campaigns to advance religious renewal, the most important of which concentrated on swaying her brother’s heart and religious policy. As an author, one who wrote much but published little until the end of her life, Marguerite expressed in her poems, plays, songs,

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2 As early as 1521, Marguerite believed her brother and mother were ready to promote “la reformation de l’eglise, où plus que jamais le Roy et Madame sont affectionnez, et le salut de toutes pauvres ames,” Marguerite to Guillaume Briçonnet, [Compiègne, c.10 December 1521], in Guillaume Briçonnet and Marguerite d’Angoulême, Correspondance (1521–1524), ed. Christine Martineau and Michel Veissière, with Henry Heller, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1975–79), 175–76, no 17 (Reid, “Additions,” no 38). She retained hope for a royal reformation even after François I’s death (31 March 1547), writing to Pope Paul III: “je le [Dieu] suplye vous [the pope and Henri II] lier sy bien ensamble et par vostre bon moyen l’empereur, ansy [ainsi] que vous troys puisiés reformer et conserver la Christienté,” Charles Samaran and Henry Patry, “Marguerite de Navarre et le pape Paul III: lettres inédites,” Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes 68 (1907), 320–38 (p. 336) (Jourda, Répertoire, no 1037). For the conventions used in citing Marguerite’s correspondence, see note 4.
and prose *Heptaméron* the profound piety and zeal for instilling in others “vivifying faith” (her term) which animated her persistent efforts to promote reform. Indeed, her literary imagination can be seen as an outgrowth of her self-appointed role as the evangelical cause’s chief advocate at court. She peopled her verse and prose works with the figures of courtiers: herself, her closest relations, and other favorites. In dialogue with one another or a heavenly guide, these figures are converted from sinfulness to thankful union with their Savior Christ. This common trajectory in her major works reflects her desire to lead those nearest to her to a renewed faith, and through their influence, others in the kingdom and countries beyond.

The focus of this essay is twofold. First, it describes Marguerite’s several campaigns—ones that largely failed—to promote, in concert with a network of like-minded Evangelicals whom she championed, a hotly contested reform agenda. Second, it relates how the literary works of the queen and authors she championed contributed to this reformation project. Evidence from those works will permit, in conclusion, a response to the long-standing controversy, one inherited from the Reformation era itself, about whether she and those around her were Catholic, Protestant, or something other.

This essay argues that Marguerite and her network shared with “Protestants” belief in a number of core doctrines.  

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5 “I have tried to use for Germany’s Protestants the name they used for themselves, Evangelicals, and to reserve Protestant for the rulers and the urban regimes that adhered to this cause, a practice that also follows their usage. All Protestants were Evangelicals, but not all Evangelicals, were Protestants,” Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *Protestant Politics: Jacob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (Boston, 1995), p. xv. For use of the