

1974-03-07 [ANCIEN REGIME]

Since there was no representative government on the national level in France, save the feeble and seldom called Estates General, the Monarchomachs really sought at best to achieve responsive government. The Huguenots needed to get some of their own people near the king, to counteract the influence of the Guise; the problem in political terms might be put as simply as that. So, they appeared to one and another of already established groups within the upper echelons of government: the peers, the nobles at large, the magistrates. Each was defined as having some independent obligation to the "people" at large; if the term wasn't meant, it was certainly intended, that these were "intermediary powers" in the state. They did not act corporatively, however, but as individuals. So, any peer, any noble, any magistrate could claim the right to have the king's ear, or to refuse to enforce his action if it were deemed tyrannous. The monarchomach system, therefore, is very unsophisticated. It constitutes no political theory whatever. It is, in fact, very backward-looking in that it rests its case only on established privileged groups. And it never speaks against monarchy itself, and never explicitly against dynastic monarchy. One senses more the perennial solution of getting rid of bad ministers by allowing a large group of privileged people in the governing class to have open access to the king; the difference is that instead of blaming the king's ministers--there was enough anti-Guise literature in print already--the Monarchomachs were accusing the king himself of having let things get out of hand. To this extent, therefore, they implied that a some rationalization of the monarchical level of government was in order. They yearned for some regular body to work with the king, like the Estates General, but knew that it was not historically a regular device or (in terms of what might be expected from it in these times of crisis) a likely resolution. The solutions which they offered were not really coherent or consistent. They did, however, pinpoint the constitutional crisis.