

# The Commonwealth of *Fruit of the*

France's King Louis XI, who reigned from 1461 to 1483, created the modern form of nation-state, or *commonwealth*, in which the nation's wealth is seen as the common property of the nation and its whole people; which wealth is a function of the increase in the free energy of the economy as a whole. In Louis' France, for the first time in history, the notion of profit, or surplus, was given a consistent political-economic expression. France, in this period, exhibited an actual increase in growth of the free energy component of output relative to the energy of the system, which created the basis for its continued development into the Eighteenth century.

Louis created that wealth through the application of technology to agriculture, industry, and infrastructure, by an increasingly skilled workforce, whose assembly included an active effort to recruit skilled workers into France from other nations. He masterfully defeated the political obstacles of both the feudal system itself, which was the predominant form of society in all Europe, and an entrenched feudal aristocra-



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*Development of rural life under France's Louis XI: agriculture, horticulture, construction of infrastructure and industry (illustration from a Fifteenth-century manuscript).*

cy in his own country. This feudal system was dominated by the commitment to usury, both in the form of ground-rent, and in the realm of financial money-lending.

The project to create the modern nation-state was very much on the minds of the European Christian Humanist geniuses who created the Renaissance, beginning with

# France's Louis XI

## *European Renaissance*

by Stephanie Ezrol

the efforts of Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265-1321), whose *Divina Commedia*, *De Monarchia*, and *De Vulgare Eloquentia* reflected an all-encompassing assault on the issues of science, statecraft, and language-culture upon which the creation of republican forms of government depended. Dante's work was continued by his student Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), both at the Papal court at Avignon, and through his Europe-wide network of correspondents and collaborators.

The concept of such a state—where government would rule “of, by, and for the people,” as Abraham Lincoln later described it—was presented as a working document by the scientist, historian, and Christian Humanist Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464) to the Council of Basel in 1434, in a book-length treatise entitled *The Catholic Concordance*. Cusa had been introduced to Plato's writings in the late 1420's through study in France of the works of the Spaniard Raymond Lull (1235?-1315), which were housed at a Carthusian monastery outside Paris. It was Lull, along with his contemporary Dante Alighieri, who had led the Platonist offensive against medieval Aristotelianism.

Cusa's collaborators were all part of the effort to ensure the realization of that idea which saw fruition in Louis XI's France. They included the Florentine Paolo Toscanelli, the physician and mapmaker who made Columbus' voyage possible; Ambrogio Traversari, who won over Pope Eugenius IV to the perspective of what would become the 1439 Council of Florence which unified the Eastern and Western Churches; Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, who helped Cusa win Germany to the side of Church unification; and Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, who along with Cusa broke



Louis XI

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with the schismatic turn of the Council of Basel in 1437.

The northern European component of this effort was centered in the Church reform movement known as the Brotherhood of the Common Life, or “Modern Devotion,” which had been launched by the Dutch scholar Gerhard Groote. Groote had studied in Paris, and maintained correspondence with his collaborator Guillaume de Salvarvilla, the Canon of Paris' Cathedral of Notre Dame. Salvarvilla who would later officially defend Groote's efforts to reform the Church, pleading his case successfully in Rome in 1384—which favorable decision unfortunately arrived after Groote's untimely death from the plague in 1384 at the age of forty-four.

The political battle of these Christian Humanists was against the oligarchical evil of Venice and her predecessors, whose ability to rule depended upon keeping the vast majority of the population uneducated, in conditions of life not much better than the animals they tended. The mechanistic method of Aristotle has always been a key weapon of these oligarchs. As Petrarch wrote in his 1368 essay, “On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others”: “No Christian, and particularly no faithful reader of Augustine's books, will hesitate to confirm this, nor do the Greeks deny it: . . . they call Plato ‘divine’ and Aristototele ‘demonius.’”

France was fertile ground for such a project, with the political legacy of Charlemagne (724-814), and a rich Platonist heritage dating to Gerbert d'Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II (942-1003), and his student Fulbert (960-1028), who became known as the “Venerable Socrates” of the Chartres Academy. Fulbert's re-introduction of the Platonic teaching method spread to the Cathedral schools throughout France, in Orléans, Angers, Tours, Poitiers, Paris, Mantes, Beauvais, Rouen, Saint

Riquier, Bescanon, and even outside France to Cologne and Liège. The building of the magnificent Gothic Cathedral of Chartres, during the years 1194 to 1260, as well as similar cathedrals built throughout France, was the crowning achievement of this movement.

Unfortunately, the primacy of this Platonist tradition was lost with the Venetian-orchestrated Crusades, especially through the Venetian sponsorship of Aristotle at the University of Paris, to ensure support for the feudal oligarchy in those Crusades.

The question of creating a political form which could guarantee the successful reproduction of human society, became ever more urgent following the depopulation of Europe in the Black Death, when plague spread from Marseilles and Corsica in 1346, through Italy, France, Spain, England, and beyond. It is estimated that between 1347 and 1351, twenty million people—one-quarter of the European population—died. In the most densely populated regions—Italy, France, The Netherlands, England—the portion of the population that succumbed to the plague was between one-third and one-half.

In many ways, Louis' model for the *commonwealth* was the Fifteenth century city-state of Florence. The Europe-wide Medici banking network was geared to providing credit for industry and infrastructure. Florence had a republican form of government whose wealth, unlike that of her rival Venice, was based on manufacturing. Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) was a part of the circle of the heirs of Petrarch, most notably Ambrogio Traversari, who forged an international Christian-Humanist conspiracy from his cell at the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence, then the economic capital of Europe. The rebirth of Platonist learning became institutionalized in Florence in 1440, with the founding of Cosimo de' Medici's Platonic Academy.

In his treatise, *The Rosebush of War*, Louis writes: “[C]ities were from the first the name of the common good or the commonweal.” What Louis did, was to successfully apply those ideas of city-building, to the work of an entire nation. As he writes in *The Rosebush*, “the Prince must provide for maintenance of the public works and edifices, and make improvements and repairs on the roads, the bridges, the ports, the walls, the moats, and the other things in his towns and castles which are necessary.” While historians such as Paul Murray Kendall have credited him with protecting the Italian Renaissance by preventing war between the Italian cities, Louis' accomplishment went far beyond such a defensive undertaking. For, in fact, he brought to political fruition the ideas of the Italian Renaissance—which could not be realized in Italy itself, owing to the constant intervention of the Venetians.

The creation of a nation, with the economic and politi-

cal might such as France could muster, and the fostering of other such nation-states, was the only way to ensure that humanity would never again face the kind of devastation that it had suffered during the Black Death—a devastation caused by the usurious, Venetian-dominated Lombard banking system, whose looting had brought about the economic collapse of Europe which preceded and allowed for the spread of the plague.

Historian Kendall relates the following anecdote in a footnote to his 1971 study, *Louis XI*:

During Louis XI's first Christmas as King, he invited the greatest array of Italian embassies probably ever seen in France, including delegations from the Pope, from Venice, Florence, Milan, Rimini and many smaller cities. Louis made known his great admiration for Cosimo de' Medici and the power of the Florentine Republic. However, he rebuffed an alliance with the Venetians, who cut short their visit and returned to their island homeland. After they departed, Louis made no secret of the fact that, as far as he was concerned, Venetian was synonymous with villain.

An admirer of Italian civilization, the King of France shared the general Italian prejudice toward Venice, which is nowhere more vividly expressed than in the memoirs [*Commentaries*] of Pius II: “As among brute beasts, aquatic creatures have the least intelligence, so among human beings, the Venetians are the least just and the least capable of humanity. . . . They please only themselves, and while they talk, they listen to and admire themselves. When they speak, they think themselves Sirens. . . . They wish to appear Christian before the world, but in reality they never think of God and—except for the state, which they regard as a deity—they hold nothing sacred. . . . The Venetians aim at the dominion of Italy, and all but dare aspire to the mastery of the world.

## The Black Death: The France Of Louis' Birth

In the first half of the Fourteenth century, France had been devastated both by disease and war. The English kings, in connivance with the Venetians, had claimed the crown of France, beginning with Edward III in 1337, undertaking a series of military invasions which occurred intermittently for 120 years, the so-called “Hundred Years War.” Meanwhile, the feudal lords of France fought both the English and each other. As the productive economy, agriculture, and industry ground to a halt, with the skilled workforce decimated by plague, these feudal lords formed private armies, whose brigands roamed the countryside, stealing what food and goods they could find, and slaughtering the inhabitants. As a result, whole towns and villages disappeared. In urban areas, the flea-borne bubonic plague quickly gave way to pneumonic plague, which easily passed directly from

human to human. Marauding bands, supported by the titled nobility, fed themselves by looting those who were spared by the disease.

Pius II reported in his *Commentaries*\*:

France, wasted by such disasters, presented the appearance of a vast desert rather than a kingdom. Cities lay ruined and stripped of their inhabitants; farms were in ashes, the country everywhere was laid waste; nowhere could a small party travel in safety; if a man escaped brigands, he fell among wild beasts.

The potential disappearance of France as a nation and culture altogether, was raised by the 1420 Treaty of Troyes, which had quickly followed the 1418 English entry into Paris with the connivance of the French Queen Isabeau. This Treaty ceded the sovereignty of France to the English King Henry V, who saw in France a rich source of loot for his ailing treasuries. Louis' father, Charles VII, the Dauphin and heir to the throne, was officially disinherited. The country split into warring factions, with much of France resisting the foreign occupation and maintaining loyalty to Charles, who in 1422, with the death of France's Charles VI and England's Henry V, had been forced to move his capital from Paris

\* *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II, An Abridgement*, trans. by Florence A. Gregg (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959).

to the town of Bourges.

Meanwhile, the French countryside resounded with rumors about Queen Isabeau. During the negotiations of the Treaty of Troyes, she had stated that her son Charles was not the legitimate heir to the throne, because her husband, King Charles VI, was not his father. Isabeau became known as the whore who had ruined France, and word spread that France could be saved only through the intercession of a virtuous woman.

In 1429, the simmering resistance was released by just such a virtuous young woman, whose parents were farmers in what is now the Lorraine region of France. Jeanne D'Arc (Joan of Arc), with support from her uncle, from Augustinian monks in Lorraine, and from the extended resistance networks in unoccupied France—all of whom were likely affected by the reform movement of the Brotherhood of the Common Life—was able to approach the Dauphin, Charles VII, and convince him to supply her with the military forces needed to ensure his coronation at Rheims, the traditional site of the instauration of the French kings.

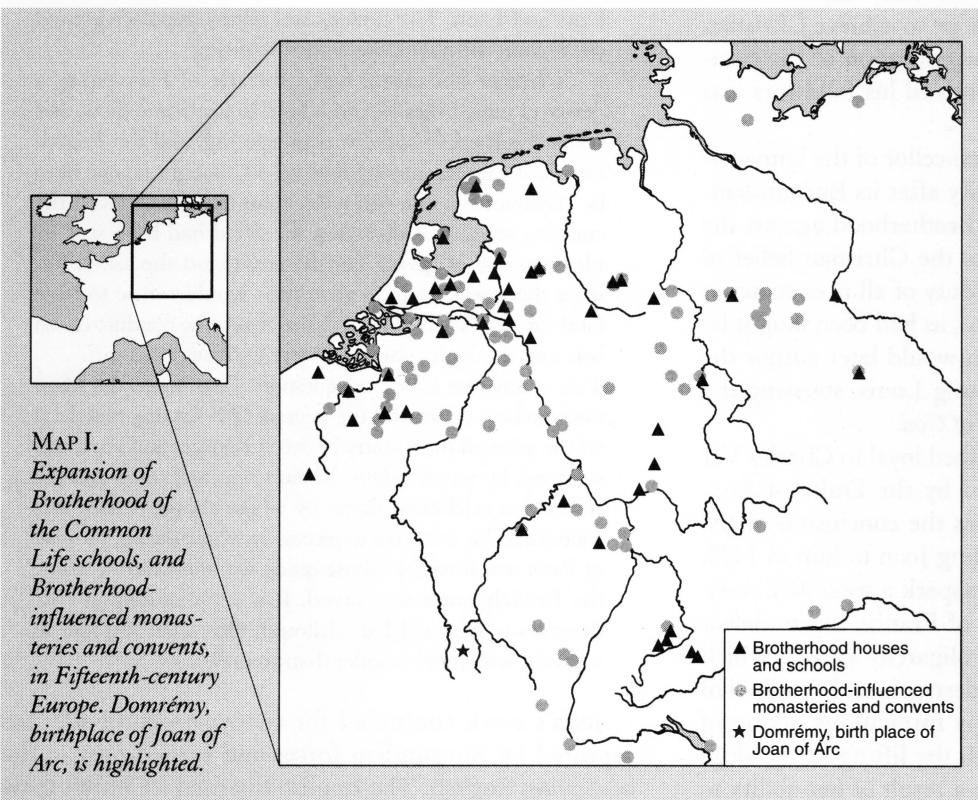
## The Brotherhood of the Common Life

Forty-five years before Joan's entrance onto the political scene, a political and religious revolution had been unleashed in northern Europe. In an effort to rebuild the moral, physical, and spiritual well-being of the people of Europe in the wake of the Black Death, Gerhard Groote

had established the Brotherhood of the Common Life in the Dutch coastal city of Deventer. The Brotherhood was a teaching order, committed to educating all, no matter their wealth or station in life.

Groote's own parents had perished in the Black Death, despite their efforts to convince Deventer to adopt health and sanitary measures to combat the plague. They had found themselves faced with a city leadership too frightened to face the coming disaster, and more willing to place their hopes on visits of flagellants. The proposals were rejected, and much of the town fell victim to the plague when it arrived in 1450.

The Brotherhood was a



part of the resistance throughout Europe to the looting by the oligarchs, whose survival was based upon the impoverished ninety-five percent of the population, whom they treated no better than the cows that provided them with milk and meat. The work of the teaching order stressed the role of every individual, no matter his station in life, to take on the responsibility of doing God's work on earth. The most famous and influential expression of the Brotherhood ideal, the book *The Imitation of Christ*, had been written by Groote's follower Thomas à Kempis.

This movement of teachers and Church reformers spread quickly in the 1380's throughout Germany, Switzerland, Burgundy, Flanders, the Low Countries, and parts of France. By 1429, many of the Augustinian monasteries and monasteries of other orders in northern Europe, had joined the movement of Groote's Brotherhood [SEE Map I]. Domrémy, the hometown of Joan of Arc, was on the border of the German towns to which Brotherhood houses, monasteries, and convents had spread. In fact, Domrémy borders the Moselle River, which runs through the birthplace of Nicolaus of Cusa, himself a product of Brotherhood-influenced educational institutions, near Trier.

In 1418, while the French Queen was collaborating with the English to allow their occupation of Paris, the Brothers of the Common Life were officially charged with the crime of heresy by a Dominican monk, named Matthew Grabow. Grabow claimed that only cloistered nuns, monks, and priests could hope to achieve Christian perfection, and that therefore the education of the common man as advocated by Groote and his followers was heretical.

It fell to Jean Gerson, once Chancellor of the University of Paris, but exiled from the city after its Burgundian-English takeover, to defend the Brotherhood against the charge of heresy, by appealing to the Christian belief in *imago Dei*, and the concomitant duty of all men to act in the imitation of Christ (*capax Dei*), as had been taught by the early Church fathers. Gerson would later author the educational program for the young Louis, stressing the study of St. Augustine's *The City of God*.

It was Gerson, who had remained loyal to Charles VII despite having been patronized by the Duke of Burgundy, who presented to Charles the conclusion of the committee of clerics recommending Joan to him in 1429. The task of Joan, was not only to spark a successful resistance to the English occupation of France, but to defeat the degenerate French-speaking oligarchy as well, which was leading the country to self-destruction through civil war. Joan's rapid, and seemingly miraculous, string of military victories, beginning with the lifting of the siege of Orléans in May of 1429, were a result of her ability to

rally elements of the French leadership and French population to her higher-order concept of the nation, based upon the dignity of man *in the image of God*.

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, includes a lengthy report on the military victories of Joan, and on her Christian virtue in his *Commentaries*. He notes that when Charles VII approached the city of Rheims, which was at the time maintaining allegiance to the occupying English forces, to be crowned,

[t]he nobles [of France] were wavering; the populace were attracted by the prospects of a change of government. . . . [Charles] dispatched heralds to demand surrender, and to announce his coronation to the people of Rheims. The city sent eminent citizens to request time for consideration, but the Maid gave orders that the envoys should receive no answer; there must be no delay; everything must be done at the time that God appointed. The Dauphin obeyed the Maid. He detained the envoys, and sending ahead some companies of cavalry, advanced swiftly on the city. Then an extraordinary thing happened, which after-generations will not believe. Not a single armed man was to be found at the gate, or in the city. The citizens, in civil dress, met them outside the walls. The Dauphin—without conditions, without terms, without the least opposition—passed through wide open gates. No one protested, no one showed any sign of resentment. . . .

After this the Maid escorted the new king to Laon. Here too they found no resistance. The whole city was open to the King. It was the same in all the towns between Paris and Laon. The citizens and all the populace poured out to meet them with the wildest rejoicing. . . .

Whether her career was a miracle of Heaven, or a device of men, I should find it hard to say. Some think that when the English cause was prospering, and the French nobles, at variance among themselves, thought no one fit to be commander, one shrewder than the rest evolved the cunning scheme of declaring the Maid had been sent by Heaven, and of giving her the command she asked for, since there was no man alive who would refuse to have God for his leader. Thus it came about, the conduct of the war and the high command were entrusted to a girl. . . . This at any rate is beyond question: That it was the Maid under whose command the siege of Orléans was raised, by whose arms all the country between Bourges and Paris was subdued, by whose advice Rheims was recovered and the coronation celebrated there, by whose charge Talbot was routed and his army cut to pieces, by whose daring the gate of Paris was fired, by whose quick wit and untiring effort the French cause was saved. It is a phenomenon that deserves to be recorded, although after-ages are like to regard it with more wonder than credulity.

Joan's work continued for two years, until she was captured by Burgundian forces and turned over to the occupying English. The English financed a Church show

trial, for the crime of heresy, run by the French Inquisitor and the University of Paris, at Rouen, where the English King was resident. Although Joan was burned at the stake, the movement she had led could not be stopped. The occupied French responded with revulsion to the English-inspired torture and execution of the saintly maid. Even the Burgundians would not maintain the alliance much longer.

## The Congress of Arras

The collaborators of Nicolaus of Cusa, centered in the city-state republic of Florence, intervened into the French conflict in 1435 through the Congress of Arras, as part of the process of organizing the 1439 Council of Florence which united Eastern and Western Churches in the principle of the *Filioque*, a doctrine which reaffirmed for Christianity the idea of man's creation in God's image.

The immediate period preceding the Congress of Arras was one of enormous tumult and political jockeying. The 1431 Council of Basel, which was still meeting in 1435, had initially been intended to solve many of the reform issues not resolved at the earlier Council of Constance. But it threatened to turn into a political forum that would re-open the schism which had wracked the Church since 1378, and had barely been healed when two of the three then-reigning Popes resigned.

In 1433, Cosimo de' Medici was expelled from Florence, but then brought back in 1434, with the help of Ambrogio Traversari. Meanwhile, Pope Eugenius IV had been run out of Rome by the oligarchical families there, and found refuge in Florence with the help of Cosimo.

Pope Eugenius IV organized the Congress of Arras in Flanders (now modern France) as an enormous international conference, involving many European princes of the blood, high Church officials, military leaders, and deputies from French towns and the University of Paris. Discussions, as well as banquets and tournaments continued through the month of August, with the tide consistently turning against the English demands for French obedience. Ultimately, on September 1, the English walked out, and by September 22, a treaty was ratified forging a French-Burgundian alliance against the English occupation.

The Papal delegation to Arras was led by Nicolaus of Cusa's friend, the great Humanist Cardinal Niccolò Albergati (1375-1443), who was assisted by two secretaries, Tommaso Parentucelli, the close friend of and librarian to Cosimo de' Medici who would become Pope Nicholas V in 1447 at the death of Eugenius IV, and Aeneas Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II (1458).

Cardinal Albergati, a Carthusian monk, was a pious individual who had surrounded himself since the early 1400's with many of the best young scholars trained in the new art of Greek translation. He was one of the Papal Legates to the Council of Basel who fought consistently to defend Eugenius' efforts for a union with the Eastern Church, and upon the Pope's requests, he broke from these duties to intervene into the French conflict. Albergati returned to Basel in January of 1436.

In 1436, the fight in Basel centered no longer on whether to have a congress with the Eastern Church, but where to have such a congress. The French delegation, which had been hostile to the Papacy, began to change its position. When a vote was called in December, the French voted for the minority position, a conference in Florence. Cardinal Albergati would go on to chair the opening session of the meeting with the Eastern Church on January 8, 1438 in Ferrara. Later, the Council would be moved to Florence.

Following the Treaty of Arras, the French scored a series of military victories, despite the continued hesitancy of Louis' father, Charles VII, to actively pursue a war of liberation. Louis maintained contact with the growing Italian Renaissance movement, as he impatiently prepared to take the reins of power in France. In 1447, after one of many clashes with his father the King, he was exiled to Dauphiné, a region bordering Savoy and Switzerland, which was an hereditary possession of the Dauphins of France, although never actually ruled by any of them.

It was in Dauphiné that Louis began his experiments in economic reform. He capitalized on the initiative of entrepreneurs and inventors, whom he protected absolutely, in agriculture, industry, and commerce. He adopted protectionist and anti-dumping measures to protect grain growers and linen producers, exempted traders from provincial tariffs while imposing tariffs on foreign merchandise, and encouraged skilled laborers from other countries to come into Dauphiné and settle there with their families, guaranteeing them tax exemptions which were proportional to their productivity.

Louis established the first postal system in all Europe, and negotiated independent treaty agreements between Dauphiné and the Italian city-states.

The rebuilding of the town of Crémieu in Dauphiné is a good example of the way Louis intervened to build cities and expand population growth. This small town had been run down and depopulated when the feudal tax system forced the local Jewish merchants out of the region. So Louis lured them back, by exempting them from taxation for a period of twenty years. This policy was put before his cabinet and put to a vote by the local government, which

# The Exoneration of Jeanne d'Arc

(1450-1456)

In 1450, the resistance movement that had been led by Joan of Arc became once again a live issue for all France, when Rouen, the city of her bogus trial for heresy, was liberated by French forces. A re-examination of Joan's trial, which would ultimately lead to her complete exoneration, was undertaken. The process of Joan's retrial and exoneration—which was a public process that engaged the entire population of France—created the preconditions for the founding of the modern French nation under Louis XI.

On February 15, 1450, Charles VII requested that the Canon of Rouen Cathedral report what occurred during the trial. An initial inquiry was held in March, and witnesses were heard. The process of Papal examination of the legal travesty of Joan's trial was begun in 1451, when Pope Nicholas V sent the Papal legate Guillaume d'Estouville to seek peace in France after a renewed English invasion in March of 1450.

D'Estouville conferred with the King in February of 1452, and arrived in Rouen in April. On May 2 the first official Church inquiry was opened. Further inquiries quickly followed, and the decision for a complete review of the entire trial proceedings was reached by July, when the newly appointed French Inquisitor Jean Bréhal was ordered to review all the records and summon the appropriate expert panels. D'Estouville was made Archbishop of Rouen in April of 1453, but the process of retrial was slowed by the shock felt throughout Europe with the fall of

Constantinople to the Turks on May 29.

On June 11, 1455, Pope Calixtus, in office a mere two months, accepted a petition from Joan's mother for a full Papal exoneration. Hearings were held all over France, at Notre Dame of Paris in November of 1455, in Rouen

in December, in January and February of 1456 in Domremy, Joan's birthplace, and Vaucouleurs, where she initially presented her mission to the local military command. Inquiries were resumed in Rouen, Orléans, and Paris from February 16 through March 16, where nobles, churchmen, and common laborers were all called before the Church to testify about what they knew of Joan and of the accusations raised at the 1431 trial. Throughout May, churches throughout France were plastered with posters calling for any witnesses to come forward.

By June 2 of 1456, all evidence had been officially accepted by the Church court, and on June 24 notices were posted on churches in Rouen

asking for objections. The official verdict was rendered on July 7. Joan was officially exonerated. The town of Orléans declared July 27 an official holiday to celebrate.

The exoneration of Joan of Arc is an extraordinary example of how, by organizing the entire population, the overturning of a judicial travesty in the case of an individual can create the basis for establishing a nation committed to a higher, universal concept of justice, as Louis XI eloquently outlines in his *Rosebush of War*.



EIRNS/Chris Lewis

Statue of Jeanne d'Arc, St. Augustine Church, Paris

required only the payment of one ounce of silver from Jews who decided to return and participate in the program of building the region's industry and commerce.

Even though the nobility demanded that the local government petition Louis to expel the Jews, complaining that they were ruining the country through usury—the common accusation made by the nobility against commercial activity—Louis and his council refused the petition. The Jews were allowed to live wherever they wished in Dauphiné.

## John Wessel of Gansforth and the Brotherhood

In 1456, as the French resistance was being invigorated by the complete exoneration of Joan of Arc [SEE BOX], Louis was forced to flee Dauphiné and seek protection from his uncle, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, under the threat of an invading army sent by his father Charles VII, who disapproved of Louis' marriage to Charlotte of Savoy. Louis remained in Burgundy until his father's death in 1461.

At that time, the Burgundian territory included what is today Belgium and The Netherlands. The Burgundian court resided near the magnificent Renaissance city of Bruges. Here, Louis would have met Nicholas Rolin, patron of the artists Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, who as Chancellor of Burgundy had been the chief Burgundian negotiator at the 1435 Congress of Arras.

Most of the chapter houses of the Brotherhood of the Common Life were in Burgundian territory, and it is said that it was at the University of Louvain, that Louis met John Wessel of Gansforth (1426-1489), a personal friend of Thomas à Kempis, the author of *The Imitation of Christ*. Gansforth had been educated in the Brotherhood school in Deventer, teaching there as an upper classman. He was particularly involved in the Florentine-born movement to seek out and translate the original Greek texts of both the New Testament and the Classical Greek masters, most notably Plato.

Between 1454 and 1469, Gansforth studied and taught in Paris, where he befriended Francesco della Rovere (the future Pope Sixtus IV, 1471-1484) and Cardinal John Bessarion. Bessarion, the Archbishop of Nicea, had been one of the chief Greek spokesmen at the Council of Florence. It was he who, in July 1439, along with Giuliano Cesarini for the Latins, had read out the Bull, "Let the Heavens Rejoice," proclaiming doctrinal unity of the two Churches on the key principle of the *Filioque*.

Gansforth went to Rome with his friend della Rovere, and remained active in Papal circles in both Rome and

Florence and until he was called back to France by Louis XI in 1473. Louis had asked invited scholars, including Gansforth, to intervene at the University of Paris against the teachings of the rabidly anti-Platonist doctrines of the nominalist William of Ockham. (A precursor of British empiricism, Ockham's neo-Aristotelian philosophy denied the existence of universals, except as names given to collections of particular things. Thus, ideas such as those of God, Truth, Justice, Beauty, or Natural Law, became meaningless. Because of this, Ockham's philosophy could be successfully used to justify the political machinations of the feudal aristocracy.)

## Building the Nation-State *Commonwealth*\*

When Louis XI took power, France had fourteen feudal duchies and ninety-four major cities, which he unified on the basis of the common good and common development opportunities. This *commonwealth* idea was conveyed throughout the country in the slogan, "One law, one weight, one currency." Louis' focus was to win the cities: to develop cultural centers, build manufactures, establish international trade fairs, and so forth, in order to attract talent from the rural areas, as well as from international quarters, to form a new political nation-state entity. And indeed, the cities contributed fully in supporting this royal policy.

During Louis' short, twenty-two year reign, from 1461 to 1483, the most significant political change which he forced through as King, was the bankrupting of the feudal landed aristocracy by the creation and defense of industries, by the opening of reciprocal trade with England, and by new treaty agreements with Genoa, Florence, Naples, Sicily, and Calabria.

Louis guaranteed the development and expansion of industries by subsidizing the cities; such subsidies came from taxes (*la taille*,) which were levied in inverse proportion to the productivity of the taxpayer. Accordingly, the feudal princes were taxed at a higher rate than the urban population. Thus, while salaries doubled during the reign of Louis XI, the income from taxes tripled during the same twenty-year period: the *taille* collected 1,200,000 livres in 1462, and had reached the level of 3,900,000 livres in 1482. Add to this other forms of tax, the "*aides*" and the "*gabelle*," which reached a total of 655,000 livres, and the royal domain, which brought 100,000 livres, for a total sum of 4,655,000 livres per year. Through the judicious use of tax policy, both levying and exempting as the case required, Louis was able to direct economic growth and development throughout the kingdom. And, where-

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\* This section is based upon historical research prepared by Pierre Beaudry and Garance Upham.



as the majority of the people in the cities never complained, the historical records are filled with complaints from the aristocracy, which was being frustrated in its privileges. In fifty years, no city ever turned against the central government rule established by Louis.

Reforms in tax policy, universal coinage, and administrative and judicial reorganization, made Louis the most hated enemy of the feudal lords, who were no longer able to wage private wars, nor exercise the privileges of potentates.

Most reforms, issued in the form of *Ordonnances* (ordinances), were posted and read out in public squares throughout the entirety of France. Under Louis, members of the nobility, who in most other regions of Europe were liable to lose their privileged status if they engaged in productive labor, were in France rewarded for such labor. Louis proclaimed an ordinance allowing nobles and churchmen to work: “Whereas among all those things necessary for the well-being use of the commonwealth . . . the [most] honest and profitable occupation [is] the industry of mechanical arts. . . . Let it be known that we desire with all our heart to enquire of and practice the means which can be turned to the profit and utility of our subjects, and give them industry from which they might profit, enrich themselves and better live under our law.”

A summary of Louis’ economic policy initiatives includes:

- Louis enacted labor laws to protect the rights of foreign workers, and set standards of production. He encouraged the immigration of engineers, printers, musicians, miners, farmers, armor manufacturers, artillery specialists, iron foundry workers, copper workers, caldron makers, weavers, silk dyers and cannon makers. Immigrants were supplied with instruments of labor, and land for homesteads, with the



*Cabinetmaker's workshop: Louis XI encouraged development of skilled trades, and immigration of craftsmen to France (illustration from a Fifteenth-century manuscript).*

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qualification that they make the land productive (a policy repeated four hundred years later by the U.S. administration of Abraham Lincoln: “Forty acres and a mule”). Frequently, there were ten-year to twenty-year tax exemptions for foreign workers.

- In a “Letter of Naturalization” and related legislation, Louis abolished the right of the state to seize the land, property, or manufactures of foreign-born subjects, and allowed them to become free subjects of France, if they so wished.
- Hundreds of stringent regulations were issued dealing with food shops, determining how long meat could be kept, under what conditions of storage and hygiene. Sanitary laws were combined with the introduction of municipal services dealing with water management, and the establishment of fire companies.

- One of Louis’ first acts as King was to establish a regular supply of provisions and housing for the army, which was the only way to ensure the development of productive agriculture—because otherwise, France’s farms were routinely looted by the army, which “moved on its belly,” so to speak.
- A census was taken of all potentially productive land in the nation, and the state took over all unclaimed land, in order to put it back into production. Edicts were issued forbidding hunting on agricultural land, which had been a traditional privilege of the feudal aristocracy. Swamps were drained to bring more land under cultivation. Wheat production and distribution was organized, to make sure that prices were kept low, and towns would always have wheat available for bread. An edict of June 7, 1482 prescribed the free circulation of grain in the whole kingdom, so as to guarantee equality to all subjects.

- Ordinances in 1467, 1470, and 1479, protected farmers from the seizure of their necessary tools and implements, in the case that they were not able to keep up with debt payments.
- Military arsenals were built on waterways to facilitate the transport of cannons and artillery. Rivers were made navigable to ensure the flow of agricultural and military goods at the least cost to the economy. The ports of Rouen, Marseilles, LaRoche, and Bordeaux were physically enhanced. Paris, Tours, and Rouen were the major armament manufacturers; those in Tours were state-financed.

Similarly, Louis sought to encourage the economic growth of the nation through fiscal, monetary, and trade policies. Here, his relationship with the Florentines was a crucial element in his design for the creation of a unified France. Louis needed a single national currency and a unified investment plan, which prioritized the physical economy; his dirigist program had to include a tax-incentive program, and of no less importance, he needed a national credit policy that would foster capital-intensive investment. There was only one banking house in the world at that time that was oriented toward that kind of development program, and this was Florence's Medici bank.

The general viewpoint of both the Medicis and Louis was, that banks were to be at the service of the nation, and not the nation at the service of the banks.

Louis won a major trade war in favor of the city of Lyon, the second-largest city in France, against Venetian-controlled Genoa. In order to lure international merchants, Louis organized major international fairs in Lyon, while organizing systematic operations against Genoa. In a famous ordinance of March 8, 1463, he established the most sweeping measures in favor of merchants who would "prefer" trading with the French city: no restrictions whatsoever would be placed on any merchant transactions at the Lyon fair.

## Education and the Sciences

Louis XI's conception of the *commonwealth* was based on the potential contribution individual subjects could make to the development of the whole nation, if given the opportunity to do so. It is useful to mention, *albeit* briefly, the following highlights amongst his policy initiatives in education and the sciences.

- A crucial change brought about by Louis, was the creation of new Humanist schools and universities directly under the King's authority. Louis presided over the creation of two new Renaissance universities of Humanist

studies: In July of 1452, he founded a University at Valence, with faculties of theology, civil and canon law, medicine, and liberal arts. In 1462, he created a similar institution with the University of Bourges.

- Under the direction of Johannes van Ockeghem, Louis' chapel master and the greatest musician of his time, the art and science of musical composition was taught to choir children. The development of children's choirs was encouraged by providing state help to boys who devoted themselves to singing, including financing for a university education.
- Astronomers, including Robert de Cazet, collaborated with such members of the Court as the geometer Jean Pelerin Viator and the artist Jean Fouquet, in map-making for navigation, and in projects for the building of ports and the diversion of rivers.

Thus, when Plato's "Philosopher King," in the person of Louis XI, seized the reins of power in France, he demonstrated to the world what such a philosopher could accomplish in a mere twenty years. The foundations of modern civilization—modern science, the modern ideas of political freedom and human dignity which had been first elaborated by Nicolaus of Cusa in his *Catholic Concordance*—were constructed on the soil of the French nation by Louis, who collaborated with the leading intellectuals of all Europe to accomplish that end.

The 1439 triumph of the Council of Florence made these ideas the predominant ideas of Christendom, no matter how they were later perverted by the Venetian machinations of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

Louis was unique for being a sovereign who himself ruled his realm. Far from being the megalomaniac portrayed by most modern historians, he explains in his *Rosebush of War* that a king must have good, wise, and prudent advisers. However, Louis believed that the king must take ultimate responsibility for all decisions, because he is answerable to a God who will judge him, just as God will judge all human beings, no matter what their station in life.

By consolidating political power, Louis created the potential to smash the oligarchical form of society and government. That was almost wholly accomplished with the 1509 League of Cambrai, which was an alliance of all Europe against Venice, the center of oligarchism. Unfortunately, the war against Venice was stopped midstream. Today we face the job of finishing Louis' work, because the coexistence of the nation-state *commonwealth*, founded upon Renaissance Christian Humanist principles, and the global financial oligarchy of looting and despair, has reached its limits. Either the body rids itself of this cancer, or it will not survive.