THE BIBLICAL ORIGINS OF THE "BODY POLITIC": SAINT PAUL'S CORPORAL ANALOGIES IN WESTERN EUROPEAN POLITICAL THOUGHT FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES *

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Résumé La pensée politique du Moyen Age fait un large usage des analogies pour expliquer le dynamisme du fonctionnement de la société. L'une de ces analogies est celle qui vise le rapport entre la société et le corps humain. Cette analogie est utilisée non seulement parce qu'elle a fourmi une imagerie plus éloquente et a laissé une marque forte sur l'état d'esprit de l'homme mais également parce que la pensée de ce temps croyait sincèrement que le corps humain et les organisations politiques médiévales sont une expression du même projet divin. Par conséquent, des correspondances précises auraient pu être établies entre les deux entités. Selon les opinions des médiévaux et des modernes, il y avait beaucoup de similitudes entre le corps et l'organisation politique. Ces similitudes ne sont pas, selon ces exégètes, le résultat du hasard mais la conséquence du plan de Dieu. Une forte tradition biblique avait renforcé cette croyance et Saint Paul se réfère à plusieurs reprises à la communauté des fidèles comme un « corps » dont la tête est Jésus-Christ. La possibilité de faire appel à l'autorité de Saint-Paul était extrêmement utile au début de la quête médiévale et prémoderne pour légitimer l'organisation sociale de ce temps historique. Cet article veut examiner l'influence des analogies de Saint-Paul, exprimées dans plusieurs de ses épîtres, sur les métaphores corporelles médiévales et modernes en insistant sur la manifestation et l'amplitude de cette influence.

Mots-clés : corps politique, *corpus mysticum*, Bible, Saint Paul.

1. In medieval times, the Church was a fundamental part of the political structure. Originally, the first Christians sought to separate themselves from a Roman state which was hostile to them and actively persecuted the Christian faith on more than one occasion. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" was the command in the Bible and, therefore, Saint Paul and many after him argued in favor of obedience

* *Les origines biblique du "corps politique" : les analogies corporelles des Saint Paul dans la pensée politique d'Europe Occidentale (du XIIe siècle au début du XVIIe siècle).*

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towards authority, because all political power was ordained by God. Yet, obedience did not equate involvement: the same Saint Paul advised Christians to settle their disputes among themselves and not take them to court, because magistrates counted for nothing in the Church (Burns 2007: 14). But, if such an attitude was possible in the early period of Christianity, it could not have lasted once the Roman Empire became Christian. Religion had already been at the core of the Roman state and, despite its tolerance, for Rome, religious issues were also a matter of politics. Once Christianity displaced the old gods in the Roman pantheon, questions of faith, which had previously troubled only a private community, became questions of state. In turn, Christian theology will be called upon to provide answers, justifications and legitimacy in matters of governance: the interweaving of theology and politics was so great that many historians, such as the reputed Ernst Kantorowicz, spoke of medieval political thought as of "political theology."

The Bible exerted its influence on many aspects of medieval political thought and one of them was the concept of "body politic." Often referred in historiography as the "metaphor of the body" (Platon 2000: 166-210), this concept consisted of drawing an analogy between different polities and the human body. The hierarchy which existed in both, the relationships between their composing parts, the way they functioned, were all supposed to be similar. This belief was based on the idea that the human body was a microcosm which mirrored, on a lesser scale, the universe. The analogy was older than Christianity: it was present in the works of Plato and Aristotle (Archambault 1967: 22-23) and it was reiterated at the peak of the Roman power by Cicero (Shogimen 2008: 92) or SENECA: 45. Christian thought expressed this analogy for the first time in the epistles of Saint Paul, albeit not in relation with the state, but with the Christian community, the original Church, which was envisioned as a body whose head was Christ. And, with the tremendous change brought to the Roman political landscape by Constantin's Edict of Milan in 313, those assertions of Saint Paul were going to suddenly gain great significance. Medieval mindset was always prone to metaphorical language and the human body made for an excellent comparison: according to Christian theology, it was God's own handiwork and, therefore, enjoyed tremendous prestige. The precedent created by Saint Paul also provided a solid foundation for a political thought which always desired to refer to authority and to base the legitimacy of its own argument on the prestige of an illustrious predecessor. For this reason, Plato and especially Aristotle had been almost omnipresent in medieval political works. In Saint Paul medieval writers had someone who enjoyed an even greater prestige and also spoke in Christian terms. This influence of the Bible and, in particular, of Saint Paul's letters on the matter of corporal analogies manifested itself in two ways: as a source of authority, since medieval writers often felt they needed to legitimize their ideas by referring to a more illustrious predecessor, and as a source of ideas.

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The use of the corporal analogy by Saint Paul in order to define and describe the Christian community can be found mainly in two of his letters. In the *Epistle towards Romans*, Paul claimed that "for as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (*Rom* 12:4-5), while, in *1 Corinthians*, he asserted that "for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (*1 Cor* 12:12). These statements led to the establishment, during the Middle Ages, of one of the major facets of the corporal metaphor: the so-called ecclesiastical metaphor of the body, where the Christian Church was defined as a body, with the pope as its head, following the example of Christ, and the mass of the faithful as its members. Originally, the notion of *corpus mysticum* appeared in the Carolingian period and had a spiritual meaning, referring to the eucharist, but, gradually, it gained a political meaning as well (Platon 2000: 176-178). According to Henri de Lubac, the reason for this change can be found in the temptation of the power claimed by the papacy over temporal matters, by an excessive assimilation of the "mystical body" into the "visible body" of the Church (Lubac 1948: 131-132). But the Pauline tradition also fed the secular facet of this analogy, of the political community – Empire, kingdoms or even city-states – defined as a body as well. The polity was also sometimes called "mystical," especially in late Middle Ages, with the purpose of granting the polity the same eternal nature as the Church possessed (Platon 2000: 187), but the terminology employed was more diverse: it was referred to as *corpus Reipublicae Mysticum* (Platon 2000: 187), *corpus mysticum regni* (Barbey 1983: 164-165) and, from the fifteenth century onwards, the writers even dispensed with the adjective *mysticum* in order to call the state only a "body politic" or "corps de policie."

There are two main ideas in Saint Paul's analogy. First, the principle of the indivisible unity of the body and the interdependency of its parts, where each member of the Christian community is essential for the well-being of the whole and none can dispense with the other. In Saint Paul's words, "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. [...] And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (*1 Cor* 12:21-2, 26). Second, it was emphasized that each part of the body had its own specific office and its own specific task to fulfill: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. [...] Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (*Rom* 12:4, 6). Yet, it has to be specified that Saint Paul was not entirely original in his argument: the notion that all the parts of the body politic were essential for its well-being and none could do without the other was expressed

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as well in Roman political thought, through the famous *Fable of the Belly*, which appeared in the works of Titus Livy, Plutarch, Dyonisius of Halicarnassus and others (Hale 1971: 27-28). Also, the concept of clearly bordered offices in the body politic had been expressed earlier by Plato, in his *Republic*, where he divided society in three classes, guardians, auxiliaries and laborers, and excluded any inter-ference of attributes between them, otherwise the whole body politic would have suffered and could have been thrown into chaos: in the words of Alexandru-Florin Platon, such interference "would have endangered the balance of the whole City, while also running contrary to the natural inequality between men" (Platon 2000: 175; Plato 2003: 128-129).

2. These principles expressed by Saint Paul had been a common occurrence in medieval political thought and they had always accompanied any iteration of the metaphor of the body politic. In the twelfth century, biblical scholarship was again being applied to subjects of political thought and political allegory gained even greater importance in the context of the Investiture Struggle, with the most influential of these metaphors being the patristic interpretation of the two swords (Burns 2007: 316-317). The doctrine of the state as a body reemerged as well from the shadow cast by the notion of the Church as a *corpus mysticum*. This change occurred in the context of a fundamental shift in western European politics regarding the character of the royal state. The old Germanic kingdoms were the patrimony of specific families and a king could lawfully divide his dominion among his sons. It was a phenomenon which plagued the Merovingians and the Carolingians and inexorably weakened their dynasties. It applied for a while even to the empire, after the death of Louis the Pious, much to the discontent of many influential clerics at the Frankish court, who would have wished to maintain the integrity of the state. "One Empire, one Church" had been the tenet inherited from the late Roman Empire, but that was a principle anachronistic to the Carolingian period. But, in the new millenium, a national administration was starting to take shape, Roman law and Aristotelian philosophy provided new tools of social analysis and a new approach to politics, while the prince was starting to be seen as the first magistrate of a republic, granted sovereign rights by his people, and not as someone who "administered the realm as his family's patrimony and headed a clientele of barons" (Burns 2007: 208). It is this change which made possible for the metaphor of "body politic" to develop with such force and rival the previous ecclesiastical metaphor of the Church as a *corpus mysticum*.

When John of Salisbury (c. 1120-1180) wrote what many called the first treatise of political thought from the Middle Ages, the functioning of the state was described through this analogy with the human body. Political community was a result of this

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interdependence and reciprocal connections between the structures of the political authority. In the words of Archambault (1967: 26-28), the purpose of John of Salisbury was to resolve the problem of conciliating, within a single political society, the royal and sacerdotal powers, as well as the various members of the political body, in a harmonious whole and, in this scheme, the prince retained his place as of the temporal order, in his position as head of the body politic. The analogy employed by the political writers was far more hierarchical than the one used by Saint Paul, but that served only to emphasize even more the interdependency between the parts of the body politic, because even the head could be affected by whatever ills befell the body politic. That was clearly not the case in the Biblical version of the metaphor, because the head of the *corpus mysticum* of the original Christian community was Christ himself, whose position was distinct from the mass of the faithful. Yet, in the medieval texts, when the supreme organ of the body politic was a secular ruler, then this principle of interdependency applied to him as well. Reiterating Saint Paul's claim that "whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it," John of Salisbury did not hesitate to point out that "nor does the head subsist safely for long when weakness pervades the members" (JOHN OF SALISBURY: 63). This principle was reiterated frequently, by Giles of Rome, in the work *De Regimine Principum* (GILES OF ROME: 47-48), Marsilius of Padua in the fourteenth century in *Defensor Pacis* (MARSILIUS: 535-536), but also by Thomas Starkey (STARKEY: 39), Richard Hooker in sixteenth century England (HOOKER: 161), and others.

Yet, this kind of similarities might not have been enough to speak of an active influence of Saint Paul's texts in medieval and early modern political thought. As we have already pointed out, there are other possible sources for the ideas found in the Epistles. What makes it conspicuous though is the fact that Saint Paul's authority is directly called upon in order to defend one's argument and this happens more than once. In the thirteenth century, in his work *On the Government of Rulers*, the Dominican friar (and scholar) Bartholomew of Lucca provided a similar graphic representation of the political community as the human body, describing his ideal polity with references to ancient states, such as Rome, Sparta, Crete, and "Chalkedonia". In the opinion of Joseph Canning, Bartholomew adopted "a relativistic approach," which mirrored political realities of his time, arguing that royal government was suitable for large territorial units, while the political rule was good for the city republic as encountered in Italy (Canning 1996: 149). Just like John of Salisbury before him, Bartholomew argued in favor of the unity of the parts of the body politic, who were supposed to work as their condition required, and, unlike John, he directly indicated Saint Paul as his source, when stating that "this body shows itself to be animated through the benefit of divine gift, and this happens with the greatest equity through the rudder of reason with the approval of God. Paul confirms this in *1 Corinthians*,

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when he shows that the whole Church is one body distinguished in parts, but united by the chains of charity" (PTOLEMY OF LUCCA: 272). The second fundamental principle of medieval political thought, besides that of unity, was the notion of clear and unbreachable boundaries between the social classes which composed the medieval body politic. The parts formed a whole and they must work together for its well-being, providing it with everything it was necessary and being provided in turn, but, at the same time, care must be taken that no part infringed upon the role of another. The medieval body politic was characterized both by a distinct vertical hierarchy and a categorical horizontal separation between the parts of equal dignity within the body. Bartholomew did not hesitate to point out that Saint Paul himself made this assertion with respect to the Church as a *corpus mysticum*:

> For this same reason Paul compares the mystical body, that is, the Church, to a true and natural body having various members with various potencies and virtues, but all having their roots in the one principle of the spirit. Similarly, Paul reproves the alleged union of I Corinthians: "If all the body were an eye, where would be the hearing? And if all the body were hearing, where would be the smelling?" (PTOLEMY OF LUCCA: 228).

Bartholomew clearly seemed to think that what applied to the Church was valid for the secular polities as well and indicated immediately that it was necessary in any congregation "to be distinct ranks among the citizens with regard to homes and households and with regards to arts and offices" (*idem*).

But if Bartholomew's assertions were a classic trope of medieval political thought, quite at the same time we can witness some far more controversial usages of Saint Paul's texts, in the works of John of Paris and Marsilius of Padua. What makes these instances rather peculiar is the fact that both authors used Saint Paul's words to attack the papacy's claims to control the temporal sword. Writing his work *On Royal and Papal Power* in the context of the conflict between Philip IV and pope Boniface VIII, John of Paris aimed to demonstrate the autonomous character of the secular power: the Church was only a mystical body, therefore contrasting sharply with the natural body politic, its ministers had purely sacramental functions and they could not legitimately intervene in the mundane life of the subjects or issue orders to rulers (Ullmann 1968: 200-201). Based on this reasoning, John of Paris argued at a certain moment that the priestly jurisdiction over secular matters could interfere with their spiritual duties and invoked the opinion of the same Saint Paul, that each part of the body of the faithful had its own specific role, in his support:

> The apostle implies this in Romans 12, saying: "We are all one in Christ, but we are individual members one to another, having different gifts." "For if the whole body is the eye, why the hand; and if the whole body is the hand, why the eye?" The other purpose is to avoid a situation where concern for temporal authority renders a priest or pope less solicitous for the concerns of spirituality (JOHN OF PARIS: 39).

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The pope claimed this *plenitudo potestatis* due to his title of *vicarius Christi*, but John of Paris regarded such pretensions more like usurpation on the part of the pope, who tried to assume a power which did not lawfully belong to him. This argument was made possible especially because John of Paris narrowed the definition of *potestas* in both Church and state to mean *dominium*, lordship over material property; more so, John argued for a separation of politics from theology by insisting that civil authority was autonomous, sovereign in the realm of temporal property, and free of ecclesiastical coercion, because the origins of the state were natural and the origins of property preceded the state (Coleman 2000: 119-120). In John of Paris' opinion, "Christ alone is properly and supremely head of the Church and it is from Him that both powers are distributed as distinct according to different grades" and the author based this statement on several quotations from Ephesians (JOHN OF PARIS: 37, 91). The author is not entirely consistent in his opinion, because, at one point, he came to admit that the pope was indeed the "head and supreme member of the universal Church" and "universal dispenser generally of all ecclesiastical goods, spiritual and temporal" (*idem*: 23). But this concession was only apparent, because John of Paris remained clearly hostile to the hierocratic pretensions of the papacy to control the temporal princes. In his opinion, temporal government was rooted in natural law and the law of nations and based on civil laws established before the Church came into existence. Therefore, the two powers, spiritual and temporal, used different tools: one resorted to the words and tried to persuade, the other employed the sword and coerced. Additionally, their goals were different: the spiritual power, through the pope, had to preserve the unity of the faith and detect heresy, while the temporal power, through the kings and emperors, had to settle disputes in matter of property through civil law backed by coercive sanction (Coleman 2000: 126).

Twenty years later, a rather similar argument was developed by Marsilius of Padua in his work *Defensor Pacis*, where he bitterly attacked the papacy for undermining the natural order by assuming excessive powers and through unjustified interferences in the workings of the body politic. Marsilius took one step further than John of Paris in establishing the autonomy of the secular power with respect to the spiritual power. The state had been considered to be a product of natural law, which made men wish to congregate into a political community. That had been the basis on the distinction drawn between state and Church by John of Paris, but it was also its weakness, because, if natural law was considered to be a manifestation of the divinity, then clerical intervention in the political life of the society was still possible (Ullmann 1968: 204-205). According to Paul Archambault, Marsilius favored the monarchical government with the consent of the people and rejected the encroachment of the spiritual in secular matters (Archambault 1967: 30). Ullmann (1968: 209), instead, argued that the type of government the people chose to institute

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was of little concern to Marsilius, provided that original power remained located in the citizenhood. We would tend to agree with Archambault's opinion, as Marsilius insisted upon the importance of the prince in his position as head of the body politic. But what remains undisputed is the fact that, in Marsilius' opinion, there was no evidence that God instituted a human government, therefore the natural and supra-natural assumed full autonomy and, as far as civil government was concerned, they had nothing in common (*idem*: 206). In this, the traditional metaphor of the body politic provided Marsilius with a useful weapon to use against the pretension of the papacy, namely the axiom that each part of the body had its own specific task to fulfill and should never attempt to interfere with the others. A body where there was no order and where the different parts interfered in the tasks of others became a "monstrous body," contrary to divine order. Marsilius acknowledged his debt to Saint Paul over this matter, when stating:

> Only when ordered in this way can the body of the church remain and increase. The teacher of the nations had this in mind when he said in Ephesians 4: "That we may grow up into him which is the head in all things, even Christ; From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body" (MARSILIUS: 426).

And Marsilius brought forward an even more radical argument to support his position, literally by turning the papalist position on its head (Musolff 2010: 92). Addressing the assertion that one whose action was more noble or more perfect should not be subjected to the jurisdiction of one whose action is less so, Marsilius retorted with Paul's own words regarding the relations between the different parts of the body:

> For although the eye is a more perfect member or part than the hand or foot, since it performs a more perfect action, nevertheless it is dependent on those others and receives from them some activity or motion. Conversely, too, those others depend on the eye, since they are directed by it to the end to which they move or are moved. Just as Apostle said in I Corinthians 12: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee" (MARSILIUS: 535-536).

In the opinion of Passerin d'Entreves (1959: 72), Marsilius' theory implied a complete dependency of the Church on the sovereign *legislator humanus* and it even imperiled the universal character of the Church itself, which appeared to be split up as it were into the multiplicity of the single *communitates perfectae fidelium*. It certainly provided a theoretical argument for freeing the secular powers from the shackles the papacy tried to bind them with and this was clearly understood in Rome, where Marsilius was declared a heretic and forced to seek refuge with the emperor Louis IV the Bavarian.

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3. Similar occurrences can be encountered in the period from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries. The concept of "body politic" appeared, for instance, shortly after its introduction in English political thought by John Fortescue, in the second draft of a sermon which Bishop John Russell, chancellor of University of Oxford and Chancellor of England, proposed to deliver before the first Parliament of Richard III, in 1483. These drafts were written in the context of Richard of Gloucester's (future Richard III) coup against his nephew Edward V, which ended with the latter being declared, together with his younger brother, illegitimate, which invalidated his claim to the throne of England. These rapid shifts in the power structure of the English government explain why there were multiple drafts of Bishop Russell's sermons, with the first parliament of Edward V being postponed due to his overthrow and the first parliament of Richard III having the same fate due to a rebellion which occurred in October 1483. In the opinion of Chrimes (1936: 122), "the views of Bishop Russell must carry great weight as evidence of the political and constitutional ideas current in his own day." The bishop "extracted" the notion of "body politic" from the famous assertion of Saint Paul, which served as inspiration for so many instances when the respective metaphor was employed. In the words of Russell, Saint Paul "lykkenythe the mystik or the politike body of congregacione of peuple to the naturalle body of man, concludynge that, lyke as yn the body naturalle every membre hath compassion of other, yn so moche that the moste noble membre may not sey to the lest or vileste of them alle, I have no need of the" (Chrimes 1936: 185-186). Russell did not only use the already established expression *corpus mysticum*, but also made room for the new one of "body politic". The rest of Russell's statement is classic corporal analogy, quoting directly from Saint Paul: the body is a functioning whole, every part has need of the other and the "body politic" faithfully mirrors the physical body, with every estate being ordained to support the other and avoiding all manner of "strife and division" (Sălăvăstru 2014: 343). For Russell, this analogy was of particular importance especially because of the context of his sermon: the metaphor emphasized the need for unity and that was something which England badly lacked at the beginning of 1484. The failures of Henry VI, whose incompetence and favoritisms were manifest, started to raise serious doubts about his ability to rule and, even more, about the legitimacy of his dynasty, a process which culminated in an open challenge to the Lancasters in 1460 and his deposition in 1461 by Edward IV. Yet unity had not been restored to England and internal strife continued to dominate English political life, both during the life of Edward IV and immediately after his death, when the York dynasty was about to be torn apart by the rivalry between the former king's brother, the new Richard III, and the partisans of the deposed Edward V or by Richard's former allies turned traitors. Bishop Russell had not been pleased with the way Richard III came to power: while the draft prepared

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for the first parliament of Edward V praised Richard as the lord protector of his nephew and castigated the Woodville clan for their supposed treachery, the draft written after Richard's ascent included no commendation of the new king and there was only one bare acknowledgment of Richard as "our sovereign lord here the king here present" (Hanham 1999: 308). Yet, for all his misgivings, Russell seemed to treasure the unity of the realm more than the rights of former Edward V. In the opinion of Alison Hanham, Russell saw "stable government as essential to the national interest" and, in this, his desires coincided with the interests of Richard III, for whom concord and government were also essential if he were to secure and maintain his position on the throne (*idem*: 319).

During the Renaissance, just like three centuries before, in John of Paris and Marsilius of Padua, those references to Saint Paul's authority were employed again in a polemical context. Such was the case of *Vindiciae contra tyrannos,* an anonymous treatise published in 1579, whose likely author is considered Philippe de Mornay or Hubert de Languet, with even the possibility of joint authorship having been advanced by some scholars (Garnett, introduction to *Vindiciae*, lxv-lxvii). Written from a Huguenot perspective after the events of Saint Bartholomew, *Vindiciae* addressed the issue how acceptable was active resistance against tyranny and how was to be put into practice. That was a delicate topic, because medieval political theory insisted upon the duty of obedience and the major figures of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin, both originally emphasized the same idea, that someone might choose to passively disobey a lawful ruler who oppressed the religion or the people, but never oppose him by force of arms. But, by 1570s, confronted with the hostility of many governments, the Protestants were already embracing the previously shunned idea of active resistance against persecution. As a result, the period after the massacre of Saint Bartholomew saw the publication of several influential treatises, such as the already mentioned *Vindiciae*, François Hotman's *Francogallia* or Theodore Beza's *De jure magistratuum*, whose arguments in favor of deposing the tyrants breaking the covenant with their people led to them being referred as "monarchomachs," men who fought against monarchs. The Monarchomachs rejected the argument that God placed all men in a condition of political subjection as a remedy for their sins and began to argue that the original and fundamental condition of the people must be one of natural liberty, abandoning the Pauline contention that political power was directly ordained by God and inferring instead that any legitimate political society must originate in the free consent of the whole people (Skinner 2004: 320). Yet, despite this focus on constitutionalism, religious arguments based on the Pauline tradition did not disappear, but were reiterated in the new created context, this time to support the principle of resistance. One of the fundamental questions raised by *Vindiciae* was whether other princes had the right to provide support to foreign subjects if

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they were subjected to oppression. The anonymous author gave a positive answer and the premise he started from was the same notion developed by Saint Paul, in *1 Corinthians*:

> As the whole of Scripture teaches, that the church is one, of which Christ is the head, and the members [membra] of which are so united and harmonious that none of them – not even the least – can suffer violence or harm, without the others being injured and feeling pain (BRUTUS: 174).

If that was the case, then all Christian princes, being part of the body of the universal Church, were not merely allowed, but they were morally compelled to act in support of the oppressed Christian, otherwise they could not be considered to belong with Christ's family.

But such Biblical references were not employed only to defend a specific argument, but also to justify the overall validity of the corporal analogies. Even though analogies were common, there were also opinions which pointed out their potential weakness. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the English civil lawyer John Hayward asserted that "an argument by analogy is not good, if any difference can be assigned" (Sommerville 1999: 52). But that was an idea which was not shared by the adepts of metaphorical language. One such person was Edward Forset (1553-1630), author of a work called *A Comparative Discourse between Bodies Natural and Politic*, where he argued in favor of an absolute power of the king. A lawyer by profession, Forset took part in the trial of the participants in the Gunpowder Plot as part of the prosecution and *A Comparative Discourse* was a direct consequence of that event. While Forset might have held his political opinions prior to the Gunpowder Plot, it seems likely that the threat convinced him of the need to deliver a powerful defense of the new Stuart monarchy in the face of attacks from its domestic and foreign enemies. According to Gil Harris (1998: 57-58), the outcome of the trial represented, for Edward Forset, the "triumphant vindication of an absolutist monarchy and its legal institutions in dealing with the body politic's enemies" and *A Comparative discourse* is dedicated to an "extended valorization of the sovereign's supreme role in the maintenance of the body politic's health." Edward Forset was obviously attracted to metaphorical language, but there had been doubts cast upon the worth of such analogies. It is apparent that Forset felt it was necessary to base his choice on a foundation as solid as possible. Therefore, unlike many of his predecessors, Forset did not refer to Saint Paul in order to make a specific point, but he did so in order to explain the overall validity of his choice. Forset (1969, sig. iij) justified himself by appealing to the outlook according to which the human body represents a microcosm, a mirror at a lower scale of the universal vast expanse, of the macrocosm. This theme of the man as a microcosm blossomed in the *philosophy of the twelfth century, within the School of Chartres with the treatise of Bernard Silvestre, De mundi universitate sive megacosmus et*

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microcosmus, in the work of the abbess Hildegarde of Bingen, of Hugues de Saint-Victor and Honorius Augustodunensis (Le Goff/ Truong 2003: 182). It was still well alive at the beginning of the seventeenth century and Edward Forset was undoubtedly aware of the value of this analogy as a mean of providing legitimacy to a political model: even though other analogies were possible, with a house, a hive or a ship, his preference leaned steadily towards the body-metaphor and, therefore, he explained his choice on a religious and a philosophical basis, referring simultaneously to authorities from both spheres. Without naming him directly, he alluded explicitly to Saint Paul's words, when stating that "the like comparison is most divinely enlarged by a much better orator, and in a much more important point of the inseparable union of the members of Christ with their head, and of the necessary communion of their distinct gifts and works amongst themselves" (Forset 1969, sig. iij).

4. The conclusions we are to draw from our study are that the legacy of the Biblical metaphor of the body had been alive not only in relation to the concept of *corpus Ecclesiae mysticum*. It also served as a powerful tool in the arguments developed around the body politic, more so since the boundaries between the Church and the state were not always clear. And it was certainly flexible: being expressed in general terms, it was employed to serve goals which often ran contrary to the policies of the Church, such as it was the case with John of Paris or Marsilius of Padua. Basically, while Plato or Aristotle already provided material for the development of the theory of body politic, the hegemony of the Christian religion in medieval and early modern Europe pushed the political writers to seek the support of Biblical authority, which the Church already made extensive use of in order to advance its own peculiar goals, sometimes even at odds with those of the theorists of the secular government.

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