# REMOVING THE KING: BIBLICAL IMAGERY AND THE DEFIANCE OF ROYAL POWER IN HUGUENOT POLITICAL LITERATURE DURING THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

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**Abstract** Medieval monarchy relied a lot on Biblical models in order to consolidate and enhance its prestige: its theocratic character, which implied an authority granted to the king by the divinity and free of any human constraints, subjected only to God's will, was greatly influenced by the Jewish kingship from the Old Testament. But the advent of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and, in particular, the emergence of its Monarchomach phase after 1550, showed that the Bible was a double-edged weapon, which could be turned against the monarchy as well: the Bible emphasized not only the sacral character of the divinely-instituted kingship, but also the obligations of the king towards God and the severe consequences of the failure to fulfill those obligations. The Huguenot political writers carefully invoked Biblical tradition in order to justify their notion of a limited royal power, by stressing out the scriptural injunction that obedience to God took precedence over any kind of duty towards worldly authorities, and their more extreme ideas about the lawfulness of removing from office a king who became a tyrant, but at the same time they were much more circumspect about the acceptance of tyrannicide, despite clear Biblical precedents. This paper aims to examine which Biblical model of removing a tyrannical king was embraced by the Huguenots and which they shied away from, while trying to explain the reason for their choice.
**Keywords:** France, Huguenots, wars of religion, Bible, kingship.

## 1. The Pre-Reformation Ideology of the Monarchy

In medieval and early modern political thought, monarchy was seen as an ideal form of government: it reflected both the Germanic and Roman imperial tradition and, at the same time, it was deeply rooted in Christian political theology. It pretty much conformed with the image of the world as a hierarchy with a single person at the top, reflection of the celestial hierarchy which allowed Christian monarchs to claim their title of "*imago Dei*", as God's representatives on Earth. The symbolism which dominated so much medieval political thought could have found its best expression only through the person of the monarch and its most visible manifestation was during the coronation ceremony, the crux of political legitimacy in medieval times. One of the earliest Frankish tracts on issues of rulership, written by



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a certain Smaragdus between 811 and 814 for Louis I, introduced the unction as the essential element of Christian kingship, a ritual which effected a rebirth of the king: the idea that the office of the king, the *ministerium regale*, had been conceded by divinity, so that the king could be said to function on behalf of Christ on earth was taking thus its proper shape within western kingship (Ullmann 1975: 237-238). The sacralization of medieval kingship continued apace during the next centuries and intensified especially during the struggle for the investiture: writers such as Ivo of Chartres, Hugh of Fleury, and the so-called Anonymous of Rouen "began to use some striking images to ground the power of kings in the will and design of God", by asserting that the king bears the unique "image of God" or that "the king is Christ and God", therefore endeavouring to "construct a messianic understanding of kingship in which the royal person might be regarded as a kind of divine epiphany by virtue of the act of royal anointing" (Ellwood 1999: 22). The development of such theories and language of sacred kingship was accompanied by their actual codification in the most important of the royal ceremonials, namely the Reims coronation: it could be described even as a liturgical act with political signification. According to Richard Jackson, the archbishop Hincmar of Reims originally "altered the liturgical texts to adapt a liturgy for a king to one for a queen" and it evolved until it become the key part of a royal „religion" during the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries: while the first well-known ordo, that of Charles the Bald, included the officiant's statement, the anointing, crowning and the investiture with the *regalia* and the concluding mass (Jackson 1992: 40), the ordo of Charles V included a great amount of „liturgical additions to the ceremony", those „concerning the king displaying an almost obsessive concern with the divine origin of the kingship, with victory over enemies, and with peace in the kingdom" (Jackson 1992: 61). The fact that the "newly consecrated and crowned monarch partook of the eucharist in both kinds" – the host and the communion cup – demonstrated that "in this one moment at least he was more priest than ordinary layman", thus underscoring the sacerdotal nature of French kingship (Holt 2005: 8). In France, the centralization process which occurred during the fifteenth century and the slow disappearance of the great appanages served to elevate the monarchy even more above its aristocracy: the king was no longer a *primus inter pares* and the great nobles of the realm could less and less behave independently. In addition to the prestige it already possessed, the Crown came to monopolize most sources of wealth and power and, therefore, could wield most forms of patronage. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the French monarchy under Francis I seemed to be heading decisively in the direction of absolutism, as an ideology which tended to obscure the limits placed on royal power was asserted more and more, especially by prominent members of the new lawyer class in the service of the regime: according to Church (1969: 45-46), it was not yet a complete theory of the divine right of

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kings, but more like "a multiplication of statements magnifying the dignity and the quasi-divine qualities of the ruler", while the kingship itself was interpreted as "originating through a direct gift of authority to the prince by God".

At the same time, there was a distinct concern that monarchical power could be abused: all political thinkers which praised the virtues of the monarchy as the best form of government placed the king in clear opposition to the tyrant, which represented the worst, because, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, in a tyranny, only the interests of a single person are pursued (Dyson 2004: 12). The king was expected to rule in accordance with natural law and the law of God, while the defining mark of tyranny was the constant and deliberate trespass of both, to the detriment of the people's well-being. It has also to be taken into account that, for all the mystical prestige which surrounded the medieval kingship, the authority of the king was not at all unlimited: the coexistence of both theocratic and feudal features within the same monarchical system of government implied also the existence of specific obligations which tied the king to his subjects and some specific boundaries which could not be crossed without sliding into tyranny. The late Middle Ages saw significant doctrinal developments arguing in favour of a limited monarchy: such was Jean Gerson, who claimed, in several of his works, that the power of the king should not be unrestrained, that there existed mutual obligations between king and subjects which were binding upon both parties and even admitted in one instance the possibility of the community correcting and even deposing a transgressing king (Carlyle 1962: 160-163). The sixteenth century had seen a strengthening of the royal authority in the foremost monarchies of Europe, namely England, Spain and France (in case of the latter, only until the death of Henry II in 1559), but at the same time the moral responsibilities of rulers were strongly emphasized: for instance, the Spaniard Sebastian Fox Morcillo published in 1556, at Anvers, a tract called *De regno, regisque institutione libri III*, under the form of a dialogue between a supporter of monarchy and another of republicanism, where the former argued that "kingship was necessary to stem the social disorder consequent upon a struggle for power, and that a king who was to succeed in this function must exhibit the orthodox virtues such as justice" (Tuck 1993: 33-34). Earlier, the Savoyard churchman Claude de Seyssel, who had performed diplomatic missions for the French monarchy during Louis XII, described a constitutionalist version of the French monarchy in his *La Grande Monarchie de France* (1519), where the powers of the king were limited by justice, religion and "la police". The limitations imposed on kings were of a moral nature, without a specific legally-binding power. The situation of the French monarchy is extremely relevant in this regard: the rituals involved in the coronation exalted the person of the king but, through the oaths he was required to take, also acted as a bridle against despotism. The promissory aspect of the coronation was just as important as the others and, for the sixteenth-century

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man, at least until the civil wars confronted him with the reality, it was unconceivable that the king, the *rex christianissimus* no less, could break them. When the sixteenth-century legists emphasized the powers of the king, besides invoking many principles from Roman law, they also insisted upon the native traditions: according to Kelley (1970: 198-199), "the kingship, while it might be decorated with Romanist formulas, was in fact defined not by analogy with the *imperium* but in terms of its individual prerogatives, that is, by those regalia which had been accumulated over a long period of time in response to specific problems that had arisen" and, therefore, "was the product of a unique historical experience; the French king was bound to no past but his own, and this past was obviously not classical but feudal". This created a tension in the doctrine of proto-absolutism developed by the French legists during the first half of the sixteenth century, because all the rights and privileges of the French kings were accompanied by limitations. The feudal past of the Capetian monarchy had been contractual and this issue will come to the fore under the pressure of the religious differences.

## 2. The French Monarchy and the Protestant Challenge

When Protestantism started to spread throughout Europe after 1520, the first reactions of the French monarchy were hesitant: despite Luther being declared a heretic by the pope, there had been a long clamor for a reform of the Church "in head and members" prior to his 95 theses. There were many who had admitted the flaws of the Church and accepted that the criticism was valid: such a circle had formed in France around the king's own sister, Marguerite de Navarre, and Guillaume Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux and one of her friends, had tried to implement changes along these lines in his diocese. But attacking the mores of the clergy was one thing: challenging significant points of doctrine as Luther had done was a much more grave matter and humanists like Briçonnet took a step back when the stakes became clear. Francis I was initially sympathetic and the harshest measures against Lutheranism were, at first, the initiative of the Parlement of Paris and of the Faculty of Theology, the Sorbonne. The turning point came in 1534 when the "affair of the placards", the posting of sheets in several major French cities containing a bitter attack on the Catholic mass, determined the king to launch the first widespread persecutions against Protestantism. Thanks to the Concordat of 1516, which allowed the king to decide the appointments to the ecclesiastical sees in France – therefore, turning Church offices in France into a vast source of patronage and tapping into their wealth –, there was no material incentive for the French Crown to go over to the side of the Reformation. In addition, the monarchy drew great ideological benefits from its alliance with the Church: in the words of Ellwood (1999: 159), "Catholic representations of the French monarch tended to rely on the symbolism of the consecration to emphasize that kingship entailed not simply the

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assumption of an office but the possession of royal dignity by virtue of an infusion of divine power" – thus creating the sacred status of the king.

Under Henry II (1547-1559), the persecution intensified, but the French Protestants also grew in numbers, despite the efforts of the government to stamp them out: the Reformation had started to attract not just common people, but also high nobles, something which came as a shock for Henry II. The peace of Cateau-Cambrèsis of 1559, which put an end to the war against Spain, was meant to free the king's hand, so that he could focus his efforts against the growing heresy: but the death of Henry II in a tourney accident in July 1559 stopped such plans in their tracks. The new regime of Francis II (1559-1560), under the influence of a Catholic faction led by the Duke of Guise and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, would have liked very much to continue the persecution (as the burning of Anne de Bourg, an official of the Parlement of Paris tried for heresy, proved), but it was too weak to do so. The regime of Charles IX (1560-1574) tried, in the beginning, to reach a compromise with the Huguenots, then waged several fruitless civil wars against them and, finally, attempted to deal them a decisive blow by exterminating their leadership during the night of Saint-Bartholomew in 1572 – an action which succeeded only in pushing the Huguenots down a more revolutionary path. At the same time, the reign of Charles IX had witnessed a constant erosion of the Crown's authority: in 1564, for instance, several months after the majority of Charles IX had been officially proclaimed in a special session of the Parlement of Rouen, the Court embarked on a two-year progress throughout the kingdom. It was an appeal to symbolic majesty, meant, according to Diefendorf (1991: 44), "to mask the waning authority of the Valois kings", to transcend "the reality of a weak, young king by evoking metaphorically the symbolic values of unchanging, everlasting kingship". Whether it succeeded in the short-term, it clearly had no lasting effects, as the Crown's actions in the subsequent years led to further decline in its prestige, and the events on 23-24 August 1572 was the final straw: the role the king was suspected to have played in the massacre was the greatest problem, because, in the words of Smither (1991: 31), "to slaughter indiscriminately large numbers of his subjects violated all existing concepts of monarchy". The image of the king as the fountain of justice was, to use Murphy's (2016: 122) expression, "at the heart of late medieval and early modern conceptions of French kingship". And it was far from a symbolic issue: the king was directly and personally involved in the judicial process within his realm, the traditional royal progresses through the kingdom being used as an opportunity by the subjects to bring their judicial complaints to the king's attention. The king's judicial role was as much a part of the ideological fabric of the monarchy as his alleged thaumaturgical powers. The massacre of Saint Bartholomew was a significant tear in this fabric: the king had acted in a manner which, according to the traditional ideology, should not have been possible, as it entailed a denial of the king's most important attribute, namely, justice. The king himself was aware of the

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delicate position he was in, as he tried first to blame the Guise family, then, when the inadequacy of this explanation became apparent, he claimed he was merely acting to preempt a coup by the Huguenot leadership. But some of the most prominent Huguenot ideologues, the monarchomachs, François Hotman, Theodore Beza and the author of the tract *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579) had their own answer to the problem: they advanced a model of popular sovereignty which accepted the possibility of resistance and even the lawful overthrow of a tyrannical king.

Out of the three Huguenot monarchomachs, Beza and *Vindiciae* appealed heavily to Biblical sources to develop their theories. The circumstances themselves which determined the monarchomachs to write their treatises induced them in that direction: the main function of medieval kingship was judicial, first and foremost, and, therefore, it became associated with the Biblical image of the king Solomon. In the words of Carroll (2006: 232-233), the image of this Hebrew king was "powerful and French kings were judged by their ability to dispense fair justice and maintain internal peace". To the monarchomachs, it looked as if Charles IX had broken with this ideal and defied the norms of a godly kingship. The Catholics had made use of similar imagery to urge the king to take decisive action against heresy, especially in those periods when the Crown seemed indecisive in the struggle against heterodoxy. In the opinion of Lange (2014: 251-252), "the image of Francis I as an avenging Hebrew king sacralised the monarchy and effaced the constitutionalist emphasis on kingship as an office". But the Huguenots turned this ideology against the Catholics themselves, when they looked into the Bible for examples not of kings stamping out heresy on God's command, but of a monarchy subjected to explicit conditions and of tyrannical rulers overthrown with divine sanction. It came easier for the monarchomach to argue for a contractual monarchy since their enemies themselves held a strong belief in limits on royal power.

## 3. The Biblical Covenant and the Status of the Monarchy in the Works of the Monarchomachs

The first basis for disobedience which Beza establishes is whether the command of the prince is in accordance with the will of God, because that is "the rule of all justice, perpetual or immutable". That was a very traditional assertion, which not even the most ardent defenders of royal absolutism would have thought to deny. But by equating God's will with the principle of justice, Beza can greatly expand the matters in which a subject can disobey his prince: the exception to obedience applies not only to those commands which are "irreligious", but also "iniquitous". The former goes against "the first Table of God's law", but the second involve the violation of "what everyone owes to his fellow man, according to his vocation, public or private" (BEZA, p. 3). The examples which Beza provides from the Bible touch two fundamental issues which the Huguenot communities were confronted with. First, the attitude the

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Huguenot faithful had to display towards Catholic rituals, like the Catholic mass or the worship of the saints, which the Huguenots considered idolatrous: it was to be one of conformity or open defiance? Calvin had long condemned the first option, charging those Protestants who partook in them with "nicodemism"[1] and many Protestants engaged in acts of iconoclasm in order to proclaim their rejection of Catholicism, which they saw as irredeemable corrupt by a clergy greedy for material benefits. Beza makes it perfectly clear, by referring to Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship the "golden image" and to Antiochus' order to "sacrifice to the false gods" – which, according to the Biblical narrative, God's faithful refused to obey – that disobedience in such a case was mandatory, regardless of the consequences, because it was an "irreligious" disposition, contravening God's law. But a princely command can also be both "irelligious" and "iniquitous" – such as Jezabel's order to kill the prophets of God –, or simply "extremely unjust" – such as Pharaoh's order to kill the Jewish children (BEZA, p. 5-7). These examples seem an allusion to the persecution the Huguenots had to endure from Catholic authorities: one cannot fail to suspect a possible analogy between these two Biblical examples and the Saint Bartholomew's night massacre. In each case, the subject was bound to disobey such commands, but most of these examples suggest a passive disobedience (except for the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus): the individuals' involved in these cases did not actually rise up against their rulers and the ultimate resolution of the problem was left to God. The same argument is brought in the beginning of *Vindiciae* as well: subjects are not bound to obey their princes if the latter command something against the will of God, lest they would suffer "so many calamities, depredations, and ravages". Princes had a limited jurisdiction and, by ordering something contrary to divine law, they would be usurping God's own: for the author of *Vindiciae,* the evidence comes from the Holy Scripture, from "Wisdom ch. 6, Proverbs ch. 8, and Job ch. 12 etc.", namely that "God's jurisdiction is immeasurable, whilst that of kings is measured", the latter exercising only an authority which was delegated to them by God (BRUTUS, p. 14-18).

If it came easy for Beza and *Vindiciae* to argue that duty to God superseded any fealty one might owe to an earthly ruler, this only allowed for the possibility of passive disobedience. In order to prove that active resistance and overthrow of rulers was lawful, the two monarchomachs had to make the people an active and responsible part in the relationship between God and kings. For this purpose, Beza and the author of *Vindiciae* tried to prove that the monarchy had its origins in a

[1] "Nicodemism" is a reference to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, who chose to visit Jesus at night in order to discuss His teachings: Calvin's implication was that, just like him, "nicodemites", even though they knew the (Protestant) truth, they refused to confess it openly.

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contractual agreement in which the people played a part and the latter submitted to its king only on certain conditions: if they were broken, then the contract was nullified and the bonds which tied the people to its king were dissolved. For them, that had certainly been the case even in the biblical monarchy of Israel, whose kings were considered to have been directly appointed by God. Beza, in his work *On the Right of Magistrates,* is quick to point out that such divine designation did not exclude people's consent: Saul, David and Salomon had to be chosen by the people as well and the Israelite monarchy retained its elective character, "as long as the people remained free" (BEZA, p. 9-10, 30). In addition, the election of the king was accompanied by a double oath: one by which king and people obligated themselves to follow God's law and then another one between the king and the people, which granted the latter the authority to correct an errant ruler. The other major monarchomach treatise, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, mixes Biblical tradition, feudal and Roman law in order to describe the creation of the monarchy.[2] As I pointed out before, "the feudal relationship is contractual and involves the loss of fief in case the vassal does not fulfil his obligations and the same principle applies to the relationship between kings and God, which is indicated as much in the covenant (BRUTUS, p. 20-21)" (Sălăvăstru 2018: 526). The biblical images used by *Vindiciae* to emphasize the consequences of a king going against God's command serve, rather paradoxically, to desacralize the monarchy: a king who did that can be considered a rebel to God, just like Saul "was called a rebel by Samuel and eventually suffered the penalty for rebellion", or even Solomon, "who deserted the true God for idols" and, consequently, his heir, Rehoboam, was forsaken by "ten tribes, the most powerful part of the kingdom" – in accordance with the principle by which "sons are deprived of their father's fief on account of the crime of high treason" (BRUTUS, p. 23-25). Biblical precedent thus creates the possibility of kings being charged with crimes usually reserved for subjects: rebellion and treason. Therefore, the idea of the king as God's image on Earth takes a hit and kings, while still God's anointed, are reduced to the status of subjects. In this context, the conception of an equal partnership between kings and subjects becomes much more palatable.[3] The ascent of the first

[2] For a thorough analysis of the use of Biblical arguments to develop the idea of a contractual monarchy in *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*, see Sălăvăstru (2020).

[3] It could be said that the Monarchomachs were treading on a common ground with the radical Catholics. At his coronation, the king swore to protect the Church and banish heresy from his realm and, in the words of Jonathan Reid, "piety seemed to be not so much a prerequisite as an inherent quality of kingship that the French monarch received with his unction" (Reid 2009: 103-104). Whether that meant that his right to rule depended on the observance of this oath, it was unclear, but, just like the Monarchomachs stressed that a king who disobeyed God lost his kingship, the radical Catholics followed their lead, albeit from their own perspective.

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Jewish king, Saul, is accompanied by what the author of *Vindiciae* considers to be a warning from God, through the prophet Samuel, against the perils of kingship: Samuel, points out the author of *Vindiciae*, "says that the king will hold his subjects in the position of slaves", but the interpretation provided by the author for this statement is not that kings would have the right to do so. On the contrary, *Vindiciae* takes great pains to point out that what Samuel described were the abuses of the monarchy and his assertion did not condone the idea that kings were above the law: the same Samuel handed out to Saul "the same royal law [*lex ipsa regia*] which is found in Deuteronomy ch. xvii" and it was "hardly likely to have done so if there was a right to break it" (BRUTUS, p. 128-129). If God Himself warns the people of Israel against the tyrannical propensities of kings, then the only logical conclusion *Vindiciae* can draw from Samuel's words is that "he does not concede any unbridled licence to the king; rather, he tacitly persuades that the king should have a bridle placed upon him" (BRUTUS, p. 129). The people of Israel paid heed to this advice, as they "seem to have been moved by this speech to temper the power of their kings" (BRUTUS, p. 129). Biblical precedent is thus employed to show that the concept of limited monarchy, where the people "bridle" their king through laws and specific institutions, has God's specific approval and the right of the people to exert the ultimate sovereignty within a realm, above the king, was condoned by divine law.[4]

The part of the people in this relationship is described through an analogy with the Roman law mechanism of debt: since the king "could easily have slipped into impiety", it would have been dangerous to "have committed the church to a single man", therefore "it was commended and committed to the whole people", God thus acting "as creditors are accustomed to do with unreliable debtors, by making many liable for the same sum" (BRUTUS, p. 38). The consequence of this pact is that "the king is bound by himself, and similarly Israel by itself, to take care to ensure that the church should sustain no loss" and "should one of them be negligent", God can call the other to account (BRUTUS, p. 39). The logic behind this example is that God could not have required from the people something which the latter had no right to do: this implies in turn that the people was authorized, even compelled, by God to take the necessary measures if the king failed in his duty. The responsibility of the people is carefully emphasized by the author through the numerous examples of the punishments inflicted by God on the whole Israel when its kings erred against God and justice: since God could not have punished an innocent, it resulted that the people of Israel were guilty of tolerating the sins of the respective kings and, therefore, they were liable for those crimes and were to pay the same penalty (BRUTUS, p. 41-45). And, just like in Beza's *Right of Magistrates*, the elective

[4] For an elaborate analysis of all the aspects of this divine approval in *Vindiciae*, see Sălăvăstru (2020).

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character of the Israelite monarchy is carefully emphasized in *Vindiciae*: even when God's designation was explicit, as it was the case with Saul, the people's choice served as confirmation, so that the king's inferior position would be manifest to all. The role the people is both passive, since Saul was first designated king by lot, in an assembly called by the prophet Samuel at Mizpeh, and active, as they confirmed Saul again "at Gilgal", after the latter "had shown some of his virtue in raising the siege of the Ammonites at Jabesh-gilead" (BRUTUS, p. 69). The fact that people's approval was not a mere rubberstamp, but, rather, was supposed to be the deciding factor is emphasized by the fate of David, who, even when selected by God to succeed Saul, "did not become king until he was first made king of Judah by the votes of the whole people of Judah following the death of Saul, and seven years later was anointed as king of Israel at Hebron with the consent of the whole of Israel" (BRUTUS, p. 68-69). The insistence of *Vindiciae* in giving the people such a decisive role in the creation of kings can be explained through its desire to establish the people as the earthly source of political authority: *Vindiciae*'s logic is that "one who is constituted by another is held to be lesser" – an argument buttressed again by Biblical examples, such as "Potiphar, the Egyptian, set Joseph over his household; Nebuchadnezzar set Daniel over the province of Babylon; and Darius set one hundred and twenty governors over the kingdom" (BRUTUS, p. 74).

Instead of its traditional use of shoring up a concept of theocratic monarchy, the Old Testament tradition is thus employed to diminish the status of the king: the Biblical pact, as depicted by Beza and *Vindiciae*, calls forth the idea of the king's responsibility not just to God, but to the people as well. The people had both the right and the duty to remove a king who transgressed against God: the idea was daring enough, but the two monarchomachs did not stop with that, but took their notion of the contractual monarchy one step further. Mellet (2006: 182-183) refers to it as a "double alliance": the covenant between God, king and people is accompanied by an additional pact this time between the people and the king only, which completes the reversal of their positions. The king is no longer the theocratic monarch, answerable only to God, *legibus solutus*, but only an administrator. He no longer possesses *dominium* over his realm: this power is transferred to the people in the monarchomachs' scheme and the relationship between king and people becomes similar to that of a tutor and a ward from Roman law. That meant that the king had only a limited, administrative right over his realm and this right was granted on condition that the tutor should not harm the rights of his ward. If that happened, the tutor was to lose its right over his ward and, by analogy, the same thing should have occurred when a king infringed upon the rights of his subjects. Thus, the manner in which the monarchy of Israel was created advances two main ideas, which, in the opinion of the two monarchomachs, applied to the contemporary Christian monarchies as well: first, that the kingship was a dignity, not an inheritance, which

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meant that "the monarchy was governed by the rules of the canonical theory of office" – therefore, "what appeared to be hereditary succession was in fact legal, customary devolution" (Lange 2014: 4-5); second, in the words of Roelker (1996: 63), that "the king, though absolute within his prerogatives, was limited by both fundamental and customary law, a belief closely related to this distinction between the kingdom, or ongoing kingship, and any particular king" – a belief which was shared by the Parlement of Paris itself

## 4. The Rights of the People and their Biblical Background

The pact described in *Right of Magistrates* and *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* had two momentous consequences: first, it allowed the people not only to withhold its obedience from a king who transgressed against God (as medieval political wisdom traditionally prescribed), but to resist him actively and, ultimately, remove him from the throne. Thus, the people become an active political actor, but, and here we come to the second consequence, only when acting as a corporation, which excludes from the start any individual initiative from a "private citizen". Beza invokes the authority of the Scripture once more, which, in his opinion, is very clear on the matter: "Saint Paul, speaking of the duty of the private citizens, not only forbids resistance against the magistrate, sovereign or inferior, but also commands obedience to him for the sake of conscience. Saint Peter also orders us to honor kings, remembering (as it is presumed) the reproach he received from his Master when, as a private person, he drew his sword against public power, even though it was used abusively against his Master" (BEZA, p. 17). *Vindiciae* emphasizes the corporative aspect of the covenant, which it obligates only the people as a whole, but not each individual, who "have no power, fill no magistracy, hold no command nor any right of the sword": in *Vindiciae*'s political model, each is "is bound to serve God in that function to which he is called", therefore private citizens are responsible only for their own spiritual well-being, not for the commonwealth's (BRUTUS, p. 59-61). Their recourse, in case of tyranny, is exile, just like the "ten tribes of Israel [...] withdrew to the king of Judah, around whom the worship of God persisted", and, if that was not possible, then martyrdom was the only path available (BRUTUS, p. 61).

The people, being a multitude, cannot act by itself, hence why it was reduced to the status of a "ward" in the covenant which established the monarchy. But the people is not at all defenceless, because it has delegated its authority to the so-called "inferior magistrates", who can act in its name in case of blatant tyranny and call the tyrant to account. Traditional political theory acknowledged the possibility of mediating actors between the king and his subjects: the most prominent such agent was none other than the queen, who, through the feminine virtues which she embodied, was ideally suited to play such a role. One such figure in recent French history had been, according to Hochner (2010: 758), the queen Anne of Brittany,

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married first to Charles VIII, then to Louis XII, who, modelling herself on the biblical character Esther, "intended to display herself as a necessary mediatory agent between the people and the monarchy [...] the symbol of a necessary power that prevented a centralized monarchy from turning into an arbitrary and tyrannical rule yet without ceding too much to the people" and „champions a moderate and checked kingship where the queen consort herself is the antidote against political abuses". But the monarchomachs take this tradition much farther, by applying it to a constitutional context where the people are no meek subjects in need of a maternalistic protection, but they possess a corporate sovereignty which makes them, as a whole, superior to the king. In such a context, the rights and powers of the mediating actors are greatly extended, as they no longer depend on their personal relationship with the king, but are precisely institutionalized: these mediating actors are the magistrates of the Crown, who can, not just to intercede with the king, but even act against him if peaceful remonstrances have failed. In identifying the origins of the magistracies, the monarchomachs turn again to the Bible and the biblical Jewish monarchy and point out that they even preceded the creation of the Israelite kingship. Beza points out the existence in the biblical Israel of the "leaders of the twelve tribes, the captains of the thousands, of hundreds and of fifties, and the elders of the people", an organization which was created under Moses and was not abolished with the advent of the monarchy, but was further refined under Solomon (BEZA, p. 18). *Vindiciae*, too, argues that the biblical kingdom of Israel possessed this type of magistrates, empowered, through the covenant, to act against an impious and tyrannical king: they were "the seventy elders amongst whom the high priest presided", "the leaders or princes of tribes, one from each", "the judges and prefects of individual cities – that is, the captains of thousands, of hundreds, and others – who presided over as many families as there were" and "military commanders *[fortes]*, dignitaries, and others, from whom the public council was assembled" (BRUTUS, p. 46). In normal circumstances, these magistrates take an active part in the government of the realm, not as mere advisers, but as actual possessors of sovereignty in their capacity as representatives of the people: thus, all major acts of governance require their consent and there is even the possibility for them to repeal the actions of the king. According to *Vindiciae*, David "convoked them when he wanted Solomon to be invested with the kingdom" or "when he wanted the constitution which he had restored to be examined and approved" and "they delivered Jonathan, condemned by the sentence of King Saul, from death" (BRUTUS, p. 78-79). Basically, the magistrates are made in *Vindiciae*'s scheme independent of the king – an obviously necessary precondition, without which they could not have fulfilled their most important task, that of acting as a constraint upon the exercise of royal power – and Biblical precedent is used to point out that they often convened together in a public assembly. The choice of words used in the Bible to indicate these assemblies is

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considered by the author of *Vindiciae* as proof of their representative character: "the whole of Israel", "the whole of Judah and Benjamin" (BRUTUS, p. 46-47). It was essential for the author of *Vindiciae* to establish this, in order to allow for the possibility of deposing an incorrigible tyrant: the author had already determined that the people, in its corporate capacity, was above the king, therefore, if it could be said that the magistrates, taken together, stood in the people's place, then the magistrates would have enjoyed the same rights as the people with respect to the king – namely, in the particular situation which the author of *Vindiciae* had in mind, the right to depose a tyrannical king, thus giving concrete form to a right which otherwise would have remained purely theoretical.

The limits of the magistrates' jurisdiction have to be scrupulously observed, something which both Beza and the author of the *Vindiciae* are careful to underline: in order for resistance to be lawful, the inferior magistrate must limit it to the territory ascribed to him and to the legal framework which he operated in. This meant, as Beza is quick to point out, that the magistrate can oppose a specific tyrannical action, but he cannot, by himself, deprive a legitimate tyrant of his office: this is something which only a body possessing ultimate sovereignty – such as the Estates General, in Beza's view – could do. The rebellion of the biblical city of Libnah against "Jehoram, king of Judah" is cited by both Beza and *Vindiciae* as an example of lawful opposition to an impious command – and it was a model which suited the Protestants well, since their movement depended much on fortified cities – by magistrates of a specific area, while David, in the account of both authors, is the exemplary model of inferior magistrate, who, while himself threatened with death by a tyrant, still refused to make any attempt on the tyrant's life (BRUTUS, p. 50-59; BEZA, p. 22-23, 30-31). *Vindiciae* places a great emphasis on the right of individual magistrates to resist tyranny even when the majority submitted to the tyrant's will: in order to make its case, *Vindiciae* refers again to "Libnah, the priestly city", who "withdrew itself from Jehoram, king of Judah, and in a certain sense deserted him because he had deserted the God of his fathers"; to "Mattathias, father of the Maccabees, of the tribe of Levi", who "took up arms, retired to the mountains, and assembled an armed force" and "waged war against Antiochus for religion and country"; or to Deborah, who rallied "the tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Issachar" against "Jabin, king of Canaan", even though most of the other tribes of Israel had submitted to the latter's domination (BRUTUS, p. 50-52). *Vindiciae* tries to counter any possible objections to these examples by pointing out that there was a clear constitutional basis for such actions, stemming from the nature of the original covenant between God and people: the participation of the magistrates in the making of the respective pact indicated not only the collective responsibility of the entire realm – in this case, Israel –, but also individually bound each city represented by the magistrates present at the covenant (BRUTUS, p. 52-53). Yet, the resistance of the individual

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magistrates, while lawful, is limited in both space and time and must cease once the conditions which engendered it had disappeared: *Vindiciae* points out again that the Macabees, "with their religion secure, accept the peace offered by Antiochus at the very moment when war could most conveniently have been waged", and the same "inhabitants of Libnah", "after the worship of God had been restored in its entirety [...] were numbered amongst the subjects of Hezekiah" (BRUTUS, p. 57-59).

The restrictions which inferior magistrates were subjected to when taking action against a tyrant did not apply to general assemblies such as the Estates, who could remove and even punish a tyrant: here, Beza comes closer than any previous Huguenot political theorist to approve a theory of tyrannicide, when he provides the example of another king from biblical Israel, Amaziah, who, according to his description, "was pursued to his death by the city of Jerusalem" (BEZA, p. 31-32). Beza was treading on dangerous ground with this example and the author himself was likely aware of this, as he strove to prove that the death of Amaziah met the standards he had put in place for a lawful overthrow: the king was killed by "a general league", "openly", by a public authority, "not for some private hatred, but because of his impiety, in direct contradiction to the main part of his oath" and then "it was approved by common consent, as having been done for a just cause". The problem Beza was confronted with was that the Bible's examples of overthrown kings were much more radical than the Huguenots dared to be: they did not really follow the constitutional steps envisioned in the monarchomach literature, hence Beza's need to emphasize that they were compatible with the lawful procedure. But the Bible posed another problem for the monarchomachs, because it includes also situations contrary to their argument, when sedition was explicitly condemned. In order to solve this problem, Beza allows for two exceptions when tyranny had to be endured patiently not just by private individuals, but by the whole people: when the subjection to a tyrant was commanded directly by God (and here Beza refers to the cases of Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar) and when the lawful procedure was not respected, as was the case in the revolt of the Israelites against Rehoboam (BEZA, p. 57-59).

Despite these frequent appeals to Biblical tradition, there is though one precedent from the Old Testament which the Huguenots theorists generally distanced themselves from, namely, tyrannicide. They accept the possibility that God might raise up an "extraordinary liberator" (whom, in such a situation, could not be regarded as a mere individual, because he would possess the right of the sword even to a greater degree than the regular magistrates). *Vindiciae* points out the cases of Moses, "who led Israel away despite the wishes of King Pharaoh", of "Ehud who killed King Eglon of Moab at the end of the eighteenth year of the king's reign" or "Jehu, who killed King Joram against whom he was fighting, extirpated the line of Ahab, and put to death all the followers of Baal" (BRUTUS, p. 61-62).

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Still, both authors prefer to avoid including such a solution among their recommendations. Ideologically, the problem of these lone tyrannicides was that their actions represented a truly exceptional event, which could not become a legal precedent: divine selection was extremely difficult to verify, as the monarchomachs themselves warned, it depended entirely on God's will which manifested itself according to criteria completely inaccessible to mankind, and, consequently, could not become part of a permanent constitutional model of the sort the monarchomachs were trying to advocate. Besides these doctrinal hurdles, there were also practical considerations which determined Beza and *Vindiciae* to stay away from such a perilous solution: resistance against a hostile monarchy by magistrates favorable to the Protestants or by representative assemblies was an action which was politically feasible for them. The Huguenots acted along these lines during the first decade of the civil wars (albeit without proclaiming openly a right of rebellion against the king himself) and they tried to act in the same manner after 1572, with the support of some high-ranking figures of the kingdom who converted to Protestantism or, at least, were in favour of a compromise and of limiting the royal powers. On the other hand, the Huguenots had no realistic option which could have led to a favourable outcome for them after a possible physical elimination of the king, and such a solution would have drawn the ire even of their own aristocratic leadership. Despite its rather revolutionary arguments in favour of a kind of popular sovereignty, the Huguenot party did not have a popular faction as radical as the Parisian Catholic League will become later, which, in 1589, became the prime mover in favour of the assassination of the "tyrant" Henry III.

## 5. Conclusions

Overall, it can be said that the Scripture is one of the authors' primary authorities and the Old Testament Israel provides them with an incontestable model in their analysis of a covenant between God, king, and people. This happened because, if there was a point of consensus in early modern political thought, which was shared by Catholics and Protestants alike, was that Scripture, properly interpreted, would provide the model of the ideal government. For the sixteenth-century political thought, the Biblical history of the Jewish kingdoms of the Old Testament represented God's providential ordering of a polity. Yet this commitment to the authority of the Bible was conditioned by the authors' dedication to the law, which had a significant impact on their understanding and interpretation of the sacred text: for this reason, they placed such restrictions upon the exercise of the right of resistance and, on the matter of the Biblical examples of tyrannicides, despite being undeniable, they expressed extreme caution. Yet, despite the extensive ideological arguments elaborated by the Huguenot political writers, a constitutional monarchical system could not take root in France. Referring to French political theory of the fourteenth

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and fifteenth century, Krynen (1989: 87-88) argues that, despite the first convocations by the kings of France of the first Estates General, the development of a cult of kingship "put a stop to any real reflexion on the role of representative assemblies" and „the partisans of rights for the community carried no weight in the face of a dominant ideology that proned a conception of the State marching to the single drum of a sacerdotal and holy king".

The ideological developments of the French Wars of Religion were the consequences of a basic dilemma of medieval political thought, the paradox of "absolute power" and "absolute limitation by law", dilemma which was recognized by the writers of that period, as pointed out by Rathé (1965: 204) in his study on Innocent Gentillet. The French Wars of Religion provided a significant challenge to the evolution of the medieval cult of kingship, but could not arrest it: the prestige and the authority of the French monarchy has been described in historiography as reaching its lowest point during this period, but, even in such circumstances, it still held enough sway for significant parts of the French society to rally against the "monarchomach" theories. Jean Bodin and Pierre de Belloy were amongst the most significant representatives of this trend, both attacking fiercely the concept of popular sovereignty in their works, well before the final triumph of the monarchy under Henry IV. The arguments of the Huguenots were appropriated and taken further by the Catholic League during the 1588-1593 period, but the pull of royalism was still strong enough to gather sufficient support for the legitimate king, Henry III, even after the cataclysmic event of the assassination of the two leaders of the Catholic League (the duke of Guise and his brother), and, following Henry III's death, to prevent the cancellation of the Salic law by the hardcore Catholics eager to push the legitimate heir, Henry of Navarre, away from the throne, due to him being a Huguenot.

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