

BIBLICAL TRADITION AND THE HUGUENOT IDEOLOGY OF POWER: THE PAULINE DOCTRINE OF OBEDIENCE AND THE THEORY OF RESISTANCE OF THE FRENCH REFORMATION DURING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY*

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Rezumat: Biblia oferă numeroase exemple și sfaturi cu privire la relația dintre individ și autoritatea seculară. Una dintre cele mai persistente idei, care a dominat întregul Ev Mediu și perioada premodernă, este aceea că toată puterea provine de la Dumnezeu, iar toți principii și magistrații acționau în calitate de agenți ai divinității pe pământ. Prin urmare, toți oamenii aveau datoria de a se supune puterii seculare și nicăieri această îndatorire nu era mai puternic subliniată decât în Romani 13, de către Apostolul Pavel. Totuși, îndemnul Sfântului Pavel punea o potențială problemă: ce trebuia să facă un creștin loial în fața unei tiranii evidente și de neîndurat? Aceasta era o dilemă cu care gândirea politică medievală s-a confruntat constant, încercând să propună diverse soluții pentru a proteja individul și comunitatea împotriva abuzurilor unui tiran. Această problemă a devenit acută în timpul Reformei, aderenții la mișcarea protestantă fiind confrunțați cu autorități extrem de ostile, care au organizat persecuții severe ce puneau în pericol însăși existența noii confesiuni. Inițial, personalitățile cele mai impunătoare ale Reformei, Luther și Calvin, au încercat să urmeze în mod strict modelul paulin convențional: nicio rezistență activă nu era permisă, iar singurul lucru pe care credincioșii puteau să-l facă împotriva unui tiran era refuzul de a se supune acelor porunci care contraveneau legii divine. Dar, sub presiunea realității, atitudinea protestanților, inclusiv cea a lui Luther și Calvin, s-a modificat în favoarea unei abordări mai beligerante, care permitea rezistența împotriva persecuției în anumite circumstanțe. Această rezistență a devenit un adevărat război civil în Franța, în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea, și, în consecință, partida hughenotă a dezvoltat un set întreg de teorii complexe în favoarea opoziției, chiar și armate, față de o monarhie tiranică. Totuși, propaganda hughenotă trebuia să depășească acel obstacol major care era doctrina paulină a obedienței, iar mulți teoreticieni hughenoți au încercat să facă acest lucru. Acest articol examinează încercările celor mai importante tratate politice hughenote de a reconcilia recomandarea Apostolului Pavel în favoarea supunerii cu opoziția activă a hughenoților – mergând până la a sugera înlăturarea regelui – împotriva dinastiei de Valois.

Keywords: Franța, războaie religioase, rezistență, hughenoți, Sfântul Pavel, Biblie.

* *Tradiția biblică și ideologia hughenotă a puterii: doctrina paulină a obedienței și teoria rezistenței în Reforma franceză din secolul al XVI-lea*

1. Medieval Political Thought and the Scriptural Influence

Medieval Christian political thought made great use of the Bible as a source for developing political ideas or strengthening existing ones. Having in mind the influence which religion exerted on all aspects of life in the Christian world, it could not have been otherwise. In fact, the impact which theology made upon political theory was so great, that many historians, such as the highly-reputed Ernst Kantorowicz, in his celebrated study *The King's Two Bodies*, used the expression “political theology” in order to refer to the political thought of that period. Theology was the principal object of study at the University of Paris, an institution which, during the Middle Ages, was not just a place of learning, but also a political force in the Kingdom of France and even the whole Christendom, recognized as such by popes and kings alike. The Church competed with the secular authorities, be them the Holy Roman Emperor or the King of France, for preeminence, striving to gain as much clout as possible in temporal affairs, even a control over the princes on the basis of *ratione peccati*¹, and this struggle saw the creation of an entire literature arguing in favor of the pope or the emperor/ king, a literature where the arguments borrowed from the Bible abounded. In addition, many princes employed churchmen in the highest offices of their realms, such as in France, where the office of Chancellor was often attributed to a high cleric, because, as the Chancellor was the head of the French judiciary and responsible for the registration of royal decrees by the Parliaments, a thorough knowledge of law, both civil and canon, was necessary and clerics were, for a long time, the most likely persons to meet this requirement. Therefore, theology (and thus the Bible) was bound to shape the ideology of power of the Middle Ages, even in the absence of the already mentioned conflict between popes and princes.

One of the most significant pieces in the Bible regarding the concept of power and the relationship between individual and authority was the epistle to the Romans of Saint Paul and in particular its Chapter 13. It was an exhortation to obedience, because “there is no power but of God” and “powers that be are ordained by God” (Rom 13:1). Certainly, it was not the only place in the Bible where one could read or infer advices to submit to the authority of the state, but it was the most poignant and most influential, because the statement was unequivocal and supported with the authority of the apostle who exerted the greatest influence on the medieval mindset. If all power came from God, then the only conclusion which could follow was that resistance to the said power was a sin against God and led to damnation: therefore, all men should render “to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due;

¹ *Ratione peccati* was a principle according to which the pope had the right to interfere in secular affairs when sin was involved; since salvation was considered the primary goal of the Christian society and the concern over sin trumped everything else, this tenet provided much of the justification for the pope's claims of supremacy over the secular authorities (Canning 2003, p. 122-124).

custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom 13:7). Yet the urging of Saint Paul was neither wholly accepted, nor unanimously: Saint Paul’s assertions created a dilemma for the political theorists of the later periods, because it eliminated any easy solution to the problem of tyranny, which was seen as the worst form of government, because, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, “there is a still greater departure from the common good in a tyranny, where the good of only one is sought” (Dyson 2002, p. 12). A wise and just prince must be obeyed in all circumstances, but the political theorists were realistic enough to understand that not all power was legitimate, nor was it always used for just ends and for the sake of the common good. In this respect, there were two types of tyrants: those who acquired their power through usurpation and those who, albeit exerting a legitimate authority, used it without justice and contrary to the common good. With respect to an usurper, medieval political theory had no hesitations: he could be legitimately and justly overthrown or slain by anybody. But a ruler who possessed a legitimate claim to power presented a problem which was extremely difficult to solve, because any action against him seemed to run against the Pauline advice expressed in Rom 13 and could have been regarded as a breach of the feudal oath. There were also practical considerations as well: rebellion was widely regarded as one of the greatest dangers to the commonwealth, to be avoided at all costs. Even in such circumstances as when the ruler turned into a tyrant, it was better to look first for alternatives and consider whether it was not preferable to endure with patience the tyranny rather than risk a sedition which could have destroyed the realm. Yet, there were suggestions that the tyrannical ruler could be deposed or even killed: John of Salisbury, for instance, the author of the first medieval political treatise, accepted even the second possibility, but under the condition that the slayer should not be someone who owed allegiance to the respective tyrant (SALISBURY, p. 206-210).

2. The Early Protestants’ Relationship with the Temporal Power

When the Reformation started, Protestant political theory took Saint Paul’s recommendation to heart and initially advised against any kind of resistance to the rulers and in favor of total obedience: both Luther and Calvin shared the Pauline opinion that all political power was ordained by God and argued that even an evil ruler was God’s way of inflicting punishment for the sins of that ruler’s subjects. There was not only theoretical consideration at play in Luther’s and Calvin’s initial total deference to the princes of that period. There was strong hope that the latter could be swayed to support the Reformation. Calvin dedicated the first edition of his work, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, to the French king Francis I and was careful not to antagonize the French monarchy, realizing the danger it could have posed for the nascent Calvinist community. When the provocative “Affair of the Placards” – the posting of broadsheets, containing a fierce attack on the Catholic Mass, in Paris and several other French towns – occurred in 1534, the leading

figures of the future Huguenot movement, Jean Calvin and Theodore Beza, distanced themselves from it. Beza were to assert later, in his history of the French Protestant church, that “everything was shattered by the zeal of a few”, while Calvin, in his dedicatory preface of the *Institutes*, argued strenuously that from Protestants “not one seditious word was ever heard” and they “do not cease to pray for the full prosperity” of the King and his kingdom, even as fugitives (Holt 2005, p. 18-22). Yet this position of total and unconditional obedience was untenable in face of reality: Luther was the first to take a step back from it, when, pressed by the German princes who had embraced the Reformation, admitted that resistance might be acceptable if the laws of the Empire permitted it (Carlyle 1962, p. 280-284). The same thing happened in France as well: while originally the monarchy did not pay much attention to the new Protestant movement, its attitude gradually hardened and reached a peak of persecution under Henry II, a devout Catholic, who even created the *chambre ardente*, a specific court of the Parlement of Paris which was tasked with investigating and judging the cases of heresy.

As already pointed out, Calvin’s initial opinions disapproved of resistance, writing in his *Institutes* that no man must “deceive himself here. For since the magistrate cannot be resisted without God being resisted at the same time, even though it seems that an unarmed magistrate can be despised with impunity, still God is armed to avenge mightily this contempt towards himself” and “we are not only subject to the authority of princes who perform their office towards us uprightly and faithfully as they ought, but also to the authority of all who, by whatever means, have got control of affairs, even though they perform not a whit of the princes’ office” (Skinner 2004, p. 193-194). But, in the words of Knecht (2010, p. 23), “Calvin was a master of equivocation and he occasionally dropped a hint that resistance might be possible in certain circumstances”. In several letters addressed to French Huguenots, such as the admiral Coligny or the pastor François Morel, Calvin provided the Huguenots with what Allen (1957, p. 58) called “a loophole in God’s scheme”, stating that rebellion against injustice and persecution was lawful if certain procedures were respected – more exactly if the Parlements approved and the princes of the blood, in particular Antoine de Bourbon, led the action. Calvin’s conditions, though, were impossible to meet in that particular case, because Antoine de Bourbon refused to firmly commit to the Huguenot cause and the Parlements, in particular the Parlement of Paris, were extremely hostile to the Reformation, despite the secret sympathies some members might have harbored for it, and constantly tried to obstruct any agreements with the Huguenots by delaying the registration of the king’s edicts of pacification. But the idea that there were certain specific legitimate authorities within the state, who could lawfully oppose a tyrannical monarch, was one which took root in the Huguenot conscience and became later, during the proliferation of the resistance literature after Saint-Bartholomew, a cornerstone of their argument.

But, while the Protestants of all colors hesitated so much whether they should oppose the hostile monarchy by force, there was certainly no hesitance amongst

their Catholic enemies to accuse them constantly of sedition and treason, despite their initial protestations. Such accusations were, without a doubt, self-interested to a certain extent, but a genuine ideological conviction was also a factor. In the sixteenth century, religion was not merely a question of salvation, but it was also regarded as the cement which kept the society together. It was not just pure eschatological Christian concern which determined the attitudes towards heresy: that certainly still played a part, but the political theory of that period considered that religious differences were the biggest element of disunity in a realm and, therefore, two religions could not coexist together within the same state without tearing it apart. In this situation, the Protestants were rebels simply because they existed. And there were more specific reasons for these charges: the French monarchy had a distinct sacral character, the anointment of the new king had clear religious undertones and the Huguenot doctrine, especially its attacks against the Catholic mass, seemed to threaten this. As Christopher Elwood stated, the idea most basic to the future discussions of the right and duty of rebellion – that power subsists in no temporal object or person but is the proper possession of God and proceeds from God alone – was at the very heart of the arguments about the eucharist that the Reformation had disseminated widely among its adherents in France: in this discourse the aura of sacredness and inviolability associated with monarchical rule was a primary casualty, with rulers being regarded as mere human beings who were distinguished from those under their care simply by virtue of their governing office (Elwood 1999, p. 160). In the words of Barbara Diefendorf, the Lutheran heresy was not “merely a failure of religious orthodoxy; it was a threat to the entire social order and a danger to the entire community. The Protestants were believed to be not only religious deviants, but also immoral and seditious”. Claude Haton, a priest from Provins, asserted that “all the heretics and Lutherans in the kingdom” were involved in a plot to kill the king because they believed him to be a tyrant and a persecutor of true Christians, and he blamed them for an attempt that was made on Henri II’s life in 1558 as he left mass at the Sainte-Chapelle, while Jean de la Vacquerie, in his *Catholique remonstrance* of 1560, accused the Protestants of conspiring to burn Paris as part of their revolt against the Crown (Diefendorf 1991, p. 53-54). At that time, there was some truth to such accusations: with the new king, Francis II, under the influence of the ultra-Catholic Guise faction, a group of Huguenots planned to kidnap and “save” the king from his “evil advisers” in what remained in history as the “Conspiracy of Amboise”. Caught, the conspirators paid with their lives and even though there is no proof the attempted kidnaping was ordered by the Huguenot leadership, the Huguenot leader, the prince of Condé, was arrested and brought to trial in the Parlement of Paris, with only the death of Francis II, which removed the Guises from power, saving him from execution. Without a strong central government and with an underage king (Charles IX) in such trying circumstances, France was heading straight towards a civil war and the spark came on 1 March 1562, when some Huguenot worshippers were murdered by soldiers from the retinue of the Duke of Guise.

It is not our purpose here to follow closely the events of the recurrent civil wars which followed, since the object of this study is the ideology which accompanied these developments. What must be pointed out is that the wars led to the radicalization of the Huguenot political theories, leaning more and more towards positions which would have seemed unthinkable some decades before. In the words of Mack Holt, Huguenot political rhetoric “had acquired a decidedly anti-royalist tone during the second and third civil wars” and Calvin himself gave the signal for this change of attitude in the last years of his life. In his *Readings on the Prophet Daniel* first published in 1561, Calvin argued that when Daniel refused to obey King Darius, “he committed no sin”, since whenever rulers disobeyed God, “they automatically abdicate their worldly power” and he went even further in his *Sermons on the Last Eight Chapters of the Book of Daniel*, published posthumously in 1565, where, describing the same biblical incident, Calvin argued that when kings defy God, “they are no longer worthy to be counted as princes... [And] when they raise themselves up against God... it is necessary that they should in turn be laid low” (Holt 2005, p. 78).

Other hastened to follow Calvin’s lead. The anonymously written *Redoubtable Sentence of God’s Judgment upon Encountering the Impiety of Tyrants* was published in Lyon in 1564 and claimed that, while “kings and princes are sovereigns set above men and that it is their right to have power over their sons and daughters and over the lands and goods of their subjects”, “when they lose the love that they [their subjects] owe to them and when they abuse their authority, Aristotle said that they are no longer kings but tyrants” (Holt 2005, p. 78). All medieval and early modern political theorists emphasized the necessity of a bond of affection between ruler and subjects, which was seen as the best guarantee against the enemies of the realm. But nowhere was it argued that, in case such a bond was broken, this would cause the rulers to lose their legitimacy. In this, *Redoubtable sentence...* expressed quite a radical idea: in the words of Holt (2005, p. 78-79), this tract advocated a “form of popular sovereignty, a notion that threatened to undermine the sacral monarchy of the French crown”. Another work which also appeared in Lyon, but in 1563, *The Civil and Military Defence of the Innocents of the Church of Christ*, maintained the right of popular armed resistance after the fashion of the Maccabees (Salmon 1979, p. 181). One of the most known Huguenot theologians, Pierre Viret, “hinted in his writings that resistance to political authority was justified under certain conditions, especially when the civil magistrates or the prince took action that encroached on purely spiritual matters” (Linder 1966, p. 131). A pamphlet from 1568, *Declaration and Protestation of those of the Reformed Religion in La Rochelle*, further distanced the Huguenots from the concept of sacral monarchy by declaring that the people existed long before the institution of monarchy, compared the struggle of the Huguenots with that of the Jews against the Egyptian pharaoh and argued that kings had no right to command the consciences of their subjects, as they ruled with divine authority only as long as they followed God’s will: “When they attack and turn themselves against God and his church, they are no longer true kings, but

private persons whom it is not necessary to obey” (Holt 2005, p. 79). Examples such as those provided above clearly show that incipient resistance theories, backed by biblical parallels, were gaining ground in Huguenot political thought even before the events of Saint-Bartholomew’s night. Yet, before 1572, there was still some hesitation and many Huguenot writers were continually protesting their loyalty towards the king, while denouncing his advisers (Allen 1957, p. 306).

3. The Huguenot Monarchomachs and the Pauline Tradition of Obedience

The Massacre of Saint-Bartholomew had a profound effect on both the Huguenot movement and the civil wars in France: it halted the growth of the Reformation in the kingdom, while it pushed the surviving communities into a decisive split with the Valois monarchy, which seemed to them to have embarked upon a policy of exterminating the Huguenots. It can be argued that the extent of the massacre surpassed the original intents of the major actors who commanded it, the king Charles IX, queen Catherine de Medici and the duke Henry de Guise; many historians made a convincing case that the intent was merely the killing of the Huguenot leadership, the admiral Coligny in particular, but the hostility of the Parisian population towards the Huguenots turned what was supposed to be a limited action into a general slaughter². Whatever the intentions of the perpetrators, the surviving Huguenots lost no time to blame the Crown for it. Catherine de Medici, in particular, was seen as the principal responsible, in no small part on account of her Italian heritage. Catherine was associated with the teaching of Machiavelli, whose political opinions were seen as contravening the traditional morality, virtue and justice associated with good governance. In the words of Knecht (2010, p. 59), “stories were told that Catherine had brought up her children on Machiavelli’s *Prince*, that her son, Henri duke of Anjou, carried it in his pocket, and that the massacre was the direct application of its advice to commit all necessary cruelties in a single blow”. Innocent Gentillet, a Huguenot who was forced to flee France due to the massacres, took specific aim at Machiavelli to argue that the tyranny experienced in France was a practical application of the Florentine’s precepts and that Italians have corrupted the French – a direct allusion to Catherine de Medici and her courtiers (Anglo 2005, p. 289-294). Many radical Catholics approved of the massacre, but, despite such partisan bias, it was undeniable that the events of Saint-Bartholomew’s night had some troubling implications, first and foremost, the fact that they had been an extrajudicial action. Francis I and Henry II had both engaged in bloody persecutions of heretics, but they did so by resorting to the legal mechanisms of the French state, in particular

² Such an opinion was expressed, for instance, by Mack Holt, in his *French Wars of Religion*, where he argues convincingly that “the popular massacre that broke out in Paris on St. Bartholomew’s night was neither planned nor condoned by the king’s council” (Holt 2005, p. 82-91) and Diefendorf (1991, p. 93-99, 168-171).

the provincial Parlements. In the words of Smither (1991, p. 31), “for the king to slaughter indiscriminately large numbers of his subjects violated all existing concepts of monarchy”, because the prevalent idea about the relationship between king and subjects was that, when conflicts arose, “they were resolved by law and with a minimum of violence, and the king, while possessing broad powers, was expected to abide by his own laws and by those of his predecessors and [...] not to punish or execute anyone without due process of law”.

The period after Saint Bartholomew’s night saw the publication of the most important works of Huguenot resistance literature: François Hotman’s *Franco gallia* (HOTMAN, FRAN.), Theodore Beza’s *The Rights of Magistrates* (BEZA, DROIT) and the anonymous tract *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (BRUTUS, VIND.) whose author used the pseudonym “Stephanus Junius Brutus” and, very likely, was the influential politician and theorist Philippe Duplessis-Mornay. Unlike their Catholic enemies later, Hotman, Beza and Mornay did not place their partisan grievances at the core of their arguments, but instead drew up a general theory of resistance which relied on “the radical elements in civil and canon law” and on the “tradition of conciliarist thought stemming from d’Ailly and Gerson at the start of the fifteenth century”, developing a concept of popular sovereignty which “allowed them to present their case for resistance as a purely political, non-sectarian argument capable of appealing not merely to Protestants but even to Catholic moderates and malcontents” (Knecht 2010, p. 60-61). In addition, the ideas of the Huguenots represent a bold advance over medieval resistance theory, as they also tell us precisely who might legally resist a tyrant (Giese 1970, p. 45).

The arguments used by the radical Huguenots theorists, who came later to be known as “monarchomachs” in reference to their anti-royalist stance, were what one could even call constitutional. According to Lee (2008, p. 375), “the monarchomachs’ claim of popular sovereignty was articulated in the form and style of a legal proprietary claim of the people’s corporate rights of ownership and lordship over the commonwealth or public property”. Hotman appealed to historical tradition in order to make his case and argued that the French monarchy had been elective, that a “public assembly” had overthrown evil kings and this custom had been annulled by Louis XI. As stated by Holt (2005, p. 101), “the implications of the author’s subtle constitutional fiction were very vivid in the wake of the massacres: Protestants were not necessarily required to obey a king who threatened them, as he could be deposed, and the welfare of the people should be the supreme law”. Beza made a very similar argument, pointing out, in addition, that it was the duty of “inferior magistrates” to overthrow the tyrants. But the most influential tract of all three was *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, who invoked the same kind of argument, that legitimate magistrates could lawfully oppose an evil prince. What *Vindiciae* brought more in comparison with Hotman and Beza was the fact that it also raised the question whether a foreign prince could give assistance to rebels fighting against a tyrant, which it answered positively. Thus, as Holt (2005, p. 102)

asserted, “Protestant discourse after St Bartholomew’s Day became a call to arms against the Valois tyranny perpetrated in the massacres of 1572”.

Out of the three major Huguenot tracts on resistance, the first, *Francogallia*, does not concern us here: as already mentioned, its argument is purely historical (even if inaccurate) and references to biblical arguments and examples are lacking. The other two, on the other hand, provide a great deal of references to the Bible, including direct references and counter-arguments to the Pauline epistle to the Romans. In this, they were following the model of Jean Calvin, something which Mellet (2006, p. 187) emphasized when he pointed out that, just like the latter, the monarchomach writers utilized the interpretative resorts of the Scripture, retaining the two exceptions formulated by Calvin about the extraordinary vocations and the obligations of the magistrates.

The most important of the two treatises, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, was built around four fundamental questions: if the subjects were compelled to submit to those princes who gave commands contrary to divine law; if resistance against those princes was lawful, by whom this resistance could have been carried out and to what extent; if the individual subjects had the right to resist a prince whose actions were harmful to the state; if other princes had the right to give support to foreign subjects in the first three cases. In order to provide answers, the author appealed to a great range of sources, such as Aquinas, Bartolus, Baldus, to some decisions of the councils of Konstanz and Basel, which proclaimed the sovereignty of the general council over the pope, and employed the theories of Gerson, Mair and Almain in order to suggest an analogy between conciliarism and popular sovereignty in the commonwealth (Skinner 2004, p. 321-322).

In addition to the references to natural law, Roman law and historical precedent, *Vindiciae* paid a great deal of attention to the biblical argument. The author of *Vindiciae* was clearly aware of the problems which Saint Paul’s words could pose for the Huguenots’ theories of resistance and acknowledged them in the text, admitting that even non-Christian kings received their power from God. The solution the anonymous writer tried to provide was to claim that this power was not unlimited, but conditional: if their personal devotion was not a *sine qua non* condition for them possessing their kingship, the greatest transgression such a ruler could commit was to try to destroy God’s work. In the author’s words, “if they scarcely attend to paying tribute to God on this account, at least let them not try to intercept or divert what is owed to God by their subjects or arrogate divine jurisdiction to themselves in any other matter. For this is clearly the crime of attempted seizure of His kingdom, which God has avenged most harshly against those heathen kings”. (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 27). *Vindiciae* first attempt to tackle this issue does not denote any radicalism: in fact, it was very much in tune with the tradition of even the most royalist propagandists – should the King transgress against God, his punishment would come from the divine will.

Vindiciae continued along the traditionalist trend by pointing out that God should be obeyed before any other worldly authority and commands which

contravened to the laws of God should not be obeyed: such an opinion was hardly a revolutionary one. In his support, the author provided a great number of biblical examples of defiance against rulers who gave commands contrary to the laws of God, but he also pointed out that such behaviour was not a matter of purely individual choice. Instead, it was argued that defiance in face of unjust commands was clearly established in the divine law as revealed by the Scriptures: “But in fact we do not lack a law framed in such clear terms. For whenever the apostles instruct Christians that they should obey kings and magistrates, they admonish them beforehand – as if they do so deliberately – that God is to be obeyed first and foremost” (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 32). To counter Saint Paul’s previous advice about obedience, the author of *Vindiciae* used Paul’s own words in order to point out that everyone was “subject to the higher power” and specifically emphasized that this applied to “every soul”, therefore no one was exempted from this obligation. According to the anonymous author, “Paul wanted to exclude all ambiguity” and stressed the idea that the prince was “a minister of God for our good in order to do justice” (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 33). If obedience was unconditional, then it would have resulted that all Christian martyrs who faced persecution and death rather than obey commands which were contrary to divine law were wrong to do so and the anonymous author was quick to point this out: based on such reasoning, the argument in favor of unconditional submission was declared an impious opinion, which Paul could not have expressed. What happened was, in the opinion of the author, a deliberate attempt to mislead from the “sycophants of princes” who claimed that “in those matters which relate to conscience king are to be obeyed”, when, instead, the advice was merely for a Christian subject to obey his pagan ruler “for conscience’s sake”, but not “in those things which pertain to conscience” (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 33).

Vindiciae argued, following the lead of Calvin, that, while resistance to tyrants, especially when the divine law was at stake, was justified, not everyone was permitted to carry it out: with this, the anonymous author gave voice to the traditional anxieties about disorder and sedition, which were seen to tear apart the state. It was often pointed out by political theorists that a king was always regarded as a tyrant by his enemies and, if the right to resistance applied to everyone, then all order in a state would disappear, because anyone could invoke it and rise up against a prince, regardless of whether he actually was a tyrant or not. For this reason, for the author it was preferable that the people “should bear bad princes, and wish for better ones; and they should think that such a tyranny is to be suffered by them with resignation, like hail, floods, tempests, and other natural disasters, or else that they should move their homes” and he pointed out that “Paul, because he describes the office of individual Christians, not that of magistrates, teaches that Nero himself is to be obeyed” (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 170). The individual subject was responsible only for himself and he should guard his body, which was called “the temple of Lord”, against all “internal corruption and external attack”, so that “God’s spirit might dwell in it”. But kings and their magistrates bore responsibility

for the fate of their realms, and, if the former were derelict in their duties, or, worse, deliberately acted contrary to the laws of God and nature, then it fell to the inferior magistrate to safeguard the community. In order to counter the recommendation of obedience, the anonymous author brought up another quotation from Saint Paul: the magistrate “does not bear the sword in vain” and the Apostle himself did not decline the help of the magistrates against an attack by the mob (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 60-64). Basically, there were two kinds of resistances, defensive and coercive: in *Vindiciae*, lesser magistrates had only defensive rights, while officers of the Crown had coercive powers. In order to explain away how could resistance be lawful even when Saint Paul asserted clearly that all power came from God, *Vindiciae* used a principle of Roman Law, that of tutorship: since the realm was in a permanent state of minority, the king was the principal tutor, while the officers of the crown were secondary tutors meant to restrain the potential unlawful actions of the first (Giesey 1970, p. 48-52).

The final argument which the anonymous author used was that princes were instituted for the common good of the people. This was an old trope of medieval political thought, which dominated, with small variations, from the very beginning of medieval political ideology. An interesting parallel could be drawn here with the theory of papal monarchy: ecclesiastic theory admitted that a situation existed when the pope was no longer pope – something which both the conciliarists, who argued that the Church constituted in a General Council was superior to the pope, and the papalists, who recognized no such thing and claimed instead that the pope was supreme and could be judged only by God, agreed upon. If the pope was a heretic, then his possession of the papal dignity was canceled by default and a General Council would not actually depose him, but merely acknowledge his loss of office. Similarly, a prince who served “only his own welfare and desires, who neglects and perverts all laws, who is more savage and cruel to the people than any enemy” was no longer a prince, but a tyrant and “those realms which are administered in this way – however extensive they may be – are nothing but robbery on a grand scale” (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 96). *Vindiciae* had already acknowledged that Saint Paul urged obedience to authority, but the anonymous author pointed out the words of the same Saint Paul that the prince must be “rendered tribute and taxes” in order to devote himself to the good of the people (BRUTUS, VIND., p. 115). This notion invoked the idea of a contract between the people and the king, and *Vindiciae* suggested that much when it asserted that, although kings were “instituted by God”, they were “constituted by the people”: this dependence of the royal power on the popular will was constantly asserted in the text of the *Vindiciae*. It was imperiously necessary to do so, because to assert, in the manner of the nascent absolutism and of the theory of divine right, that kings owed their power exclusively to God would have meant that they were responsible also only to God. A covenant between king and God, even for the sake of the people, made the people a beneficiary, but under the constant tutelage of the king and would have

eliminated by default any possibility of exerting any kind of control upon the exercise of royal power.

In the other capital work of the Huguenot theory of resistance, Beza's *Rights of the Magistrates*, we encounter the same concern for a constitutionalist opposition to the Crown and the habitual interdiction that a private person should never take arms on his own against his sovereign – instead his only resort was to pray and passively resists the unlawful commands or flee. Their opinion about the lawfulness of resistance and the methods to be employed against a tyrant is not the only feature which Beza shares with the author of *Vindiciae*, but there is a lot of common ground with respect to their rhetorical methodology, the same blending of scriptural and secular arguments. VanDrunen (2005/ 2006, p. 152-153) remarked that, throughout his treatise, Beza constructed his theory through a constant movement between arguments taken from the Bible and arguments from natural law.

The basis for Beza's opinion that a private individual had no personal right of resistance is Saint Paul's letter: "And yet another argument, weightier than all the others that might be brought forward to the contrary, is the authority of God's word, which is unfailingly clear. St. Paul, speaking of the duty of a private citizen, not only forbids resistance to any magistrate, inferior as well as sovereign, but commands obedience for conscience's sake" (Franklin 1969, p. 109). That does not mean that a private citizen did not have any redress against manifest tyranny, but he must rely on a constitutional mechanism in order to protect himself against the depredations of an unjust ruler – and only "insofar as it is expedient". In Beza's words, when "St. Paul was outraged and whipped at Philippi by an ill-advised magistrate acting contrary to his rights as a Roman citizen, and without even hearing his case, he decided that patience would better serve God's glory and pursued his rights no further, merely admonishing the magistrates for their violation of the law" (Franklin 1969, p. 103).

What Beza had in mind first and foremost was tyranny against religion: tyrannical acts could be committed against the physical well-being of the subjects, but, in the view of the Huguenot monarchomachs, these were far more tolerable. Just like the author of *Vindiciae*, Beza made it very clear that Paul's advice about obedience applied only to what he called "private citizens", whose only resort in face of tyranny was prayer; when magistrates were concerned, then prayer was no longer the exclusive remedy (Franklin 1969, p. 131). Beza was able to cloak his argument for resistance in such a constitutionalist language because French political theory had a long tradition in distinguishing between the office and the office-holder. One hundred and fifty years earlier, at the peak of the Hundred Years War and when the fate of the Valois dynasty seemed to hang in the balance, the jurist Jean de Terre Rouge argued that royal authority was a body of rights independent of the authority of the kings who received it merely in trust for the duration of his reign (Church 1969, p. 29). This allowed Beza to challenge the idea that the king held all authority of rulership, instead arguing, according to Church (1969, p. 123-124), that

the minor magistrates formed an intermediate element between the king and the people and they were rather officers of the Crown and not of the king, as they held their authority not from him, but from the general body of sovereignty. Because only the magistrates could act against a tyrannical prince, Beza must have an institution which should have been able to do so and that institution was the Estates-General. Even though he put less emphasis on the Estates than, say, Hotman, Beza asserted that sovereignty lied with the Estates and that it had the power to elect and depose rulers (Bakos 1990, 13).

4. Conclusions

Overall, one can conclude that the answers which the Huguenots tried to give to the exhortation to obedience contained in the words of Saint Paul were based both on a reinterpretation of Paul's ideas in order to make them less restrictive and on the development of a constitutionalist trend which combined both traditional ideas of Roman law, such as the concept that the prince was instituted for the common good of the polity, and completely new principles such as the sovereignty being embodied in the people. The first tactic was something to be expected, but the second approach could be rightfully described as revolutionary because it placed the royal power under the authority of other earthly institutions – even though only in exceptional circumstances. Basically, the Huguenots sidestepped their dilemma by finding a different *locus* for the sovereignty in the state: based on such reasoning, there was no direct contradiction with Saint Paul's command that all power must be obeyed, because ultimate power no longer resided in the king. While the usual exercise of this power belonged to him, there was an exceptional sovereignty existing within the state, resulting from the original covenant which constituted the commonwealth, which activated in exceptional circumstances. Yet, the Huguenot theorists always placed themselves within strict constitutional limits, and never took that final step (which the radical Catholic League would do at a later time) to argue that anyone was entitled to take action against a tyrant. One must not forget that Huguenots were still a minority in France and, despite the misgivings against the Valois monarchy, the same constraints which determined Calvin to take a moderate stance on the issue several decades earlier still applied. The constitutionalism of Beza and *Vindiciae* was necessary because, at a time when the Huguenot parts of France were becoming *de facto* independent and they were suspected of wanting to overthrow the monarchy altogether, the Huguenot propaganda had to maintain that their struggle was directed against individual tyrants, not against the institution of the monarchy per se. As contradictory as it may seem, they still had to appear as loyal subjects so they would not give more material to the intransigent Catholics who, after the publication of the monarchomach tracts, were more than ever eager to denounce the Huguenot propensity for sedition and felony (Daussy 2004, p. 64). And the theories of the monarchomachs had a significant influence during the next phases of the Wars of Religion: because they were designed from the very

beginning not to be sectarian in order to appeal to the moderate Catholics, whose support was essential if any policy of toleration was to have any success, they could very well be appropriated by the radical Catholics disillusioned with the Valois monarchy. By countering the Pauline recommendation for total obedience, the Huguenots laid the groundwork for the Catholic League to argue that a tyrant who worked against God – and that, for the Catholics, meant tolerating heresy – could be overthrown or even slain, by anyone, without concern that they would contravene biblical commands.

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