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The Paper

In 1577 the anonymous author of a text called the *Readvis & abjuration d'un Gentilhomme de la Ligue, contenant les causes pour lesquelles il a renoncé à ladite Ligue, & s'en est departy* wrote the following:

A League in a political constitution is a solemn contract, sworn between equals, and not subjects to the power of another, in order to conserve and preserve their liberty, as much offensively as defensively, between and against everyone. From which definition there are two necessary conclusions: one that Subjects cannot contract a League in a monarchical constitution without renouncing the protection of the Prince, and, as a consequence, shaking off the subjection that they owe to the sovereignty. The other is that the King, in signing a League with his Subjects, divests himself of the sovereign power which he has over them, and receives them and their society in peace.

The author characterises the Catholic League as presenting a direct and explicit opponent to monarchy. Even Henri III, in declaring himself its head in December, 1576, could no longer sustain his own sovereign power once he associated with the League according to this text. By its very existence, the author shows the League to have a dissolvent effect on monarchical authority. This argument is all the more striking given the fact that no League text ever suggests any alternative constitution to that of monarchy in France. The figure of the *Roi Très Chrétien* is the centrepiece of their diverse and wide-ranging polemic which presented a threat not to monarchy itself, but to monarchs who failed to 'protect' the Catholic church.

‘Fanatic and turbulent’, in the words of Simon Goulart, the League was commonly described in the polemic as an organisation designed to bring destruction and ruin on France and undermine the very foundations of the commonwealth and the French monarchy. Palma Cayet and Pierre de l’Estoile were amongst the loudest critics of this organisation which called itself the *Sainte Union*. Politiques and Huguenots shared a common antipathy towards the League, arguing that under their ‘mask’ of piety lay nothing more than a collective will bent on rebellion and a shrewd bid for power from the house of Guise.

Contemporary scholarship has become increasingly aware of the problems of viewing the League through the lens of its opponents, presenting the movement as socially complex and united by its attempt to reform the French kingdom in this period. Whilst this is strongly the case in social and cultural scholarship, it is also the case that modern characterisations of League political theory remain conceptually reliant on the idea of a League mentality committed to resistance and rebellion. John Salmon’s article on ‘Catholic resistance theory’ and Frederic Baumgartner’s *Radical Reactionaries* are particular cases in point. Observations from Cayet and William Barclay that the Leaguers depended on Huguenot treatises of the 1570s for their arguments have continued to frame contemporary responses to League political thought. There are certainly grounds for this comparison, especially with regards to the construction of theories of legitimate tyrannicide in a monarchical polity. However, this paper premises its argument on the thought that emphasis on assassination and resistance has eclipsed other, no less important, elements of League thought. This is shown to be particularly the case with the *De Justa Reipublicae Christianae Autoritate*.

This paper endeavours to demonstrate that whilst the text can be read in the context of the assassinations of Henri III and IV, it can also be put in dialogue with another contemporary discourse operating on a more sophisticated theoretical level. As a part of continental Catholic European discussions of the nature of political power and the original sources of authority, this text owes a far greater intellectual debt to Thomist and Aristotelian thought, and in particular to the thinkers of the second Scholastic than to the Calvinists of the 1570s.

Suggested Reading:

- T. Amalou, *Le Lys et La Mitre. Loyalisme monarchique et pouvoir épiscopal pendant les guerres de Religion (1580-1610)* (Paris 2007).
- F.J. Baumgartner, *Radical Reactionaries. The Political Thought of the French Catholic League* (Geneva 1976).

- C. Beaune, *Naissance de la Nation France* (Paris 1985).
- A-M. Brenot, 'Le Corps pour Royaume. Un langage politique de la fin du XVI^e siècle et début du XVII^e' in *Histoire, économie et société*, vol.10, no.4 (1991), pp.441-466.
- S. Hanley, *The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France: Constitutional Ideology in Legend, Ritual and Discourse* (Princeton 1983).
- R.A. Jackson, 'Elective monarchy and *consensus populi* in sixteenth-century France' in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1972), pp. 155-171.
- J. Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France* (Washington 2004).
- M. Penzi, 'Les pamphlets Ligueurs et la polémique anti-ligueuse: faux-textes et « vrai faux ». Propagande et manipulation du récit (1576-1584)' in J. Berthold and M-M Fragonard (eds.), *La Mémoire des Guerres de Religion. La concurrence des genres historiques (xvi^e-vxii^e siècles)* (Geneva 2007), pp.133-151.
- A. Ramsay, *Liturgy, Politics and Salvation: the Catholic League in Paris and the nature of Catholic reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester, N.Y., 1999).
- J.H.M. Salmon, 'Catholic resistance theory, Ultramontanism, and the royalist response, 1580-1620' in J.H. Burns (ed.), with the assistance of Mark Goldie, *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700* (Cambridge 1991), pp. 219-153.