The Right of Resistance in Jean Calvin and the Monarchomachs

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Abstract

The Monarchomach treatises, which were published after the Saint-Bartholomew massacres of 1572, aimed at giving the Protestant minority a theoretically consistent right of resistance against the oppressive Catholic regime of sixteenth century France. As paradoxical as it may appear, these treatises also stemmed directly from Jean Calvin's doctrine of absolute obedience. This article's contribution consists in accounting for the radical political pragmatism found in the Monarchomach treatises, despite their significant attachment to Calvin's doctrine. Methodological difficulties for today's reader of the history of political ideas will be encountered, and in this matter, philosophy and history will work together at sketching an original work hypothesis, blending together an internal and an external reading of the selected corpus.

The Monarchomach treatises were published following the Saint-Bartholomew massacres of 1572. This date is too often regarded as *the* day of the massacres, mainly because the violence reached an unprecedented paroxysm that has been well documented. Anyone who sees them will recall the extremely gory details of François Dubois' famous painting. But the reader should keep in mind that the persecutions against the Protestant minority had been perpetrated on a smaller but nonetheless politically significant scale on many occasions throughout the sixteenth century. The Monarchomach treatises were mostly written before the massacres, whose occurrence contributed to make their publication more urgent.

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Despite the violence that had been perpetrated against the Protestant minority, the theoretical consistency found in the Monarchomach treatises gave them relevance that extended beyond the stormy days of the religious wars and established them as early voices in a larger discussion on the right of resistance and its relationship to civil peace. Such a discussion remains meaningful today, though the terms of the debate have thoroughly changed. In this respect, one may recall the "fact of reasonable pluralism" identified by John Rawls as the common feature of all pluralist societies. Rawls himself asserts that political liberalism is at least partially rooted in the tolerance principle that emerged from the religious wars and the subsequent controversy revolving around the right of resistance[1].

The first use of the word "monarchomach" is attributed to William Barclay (*De Regno et Regali Potestate,* 1600). Originally a pejorative designation of Huguenots thinkers, the term eventually encompassed anyone who opposed the monarch's rule. Even though today the term broadly relates to thinkers of the right of resistance who wrote by the end of the sixteenth century in Europe, this article will focus on three major French Monarchomachs, that is, the jurist François Hotman (author of the *Francogallia*, 1573), Philippe Duplessis-Mornay (presumably the author of the *Vindicae contra tyrannos*, 1579), and above all, the theologian of whom Calvin was the master, Théodore de Bèze (*Du droit des magistrats sur leurs sujets*, 1574).

The Monarchomach treatises contended that the political order was meant to protect the whole society, and particularly the religious minority to which they belonged. Though the king's authority was still considered of divine right, his powers were bound to divine duties and a contractual obligation towards the people. Some argue that this makes them thinkers of the contractual political theory, the people being the true sovereign and the king possessing only the executive power, but it is not clear whether the contract bounds the king to the people directly or indirectly, through God's will. This distinction notwithstanding, the Monarchomachs' most original contribution can be summarised in that there existed a form of popular sovereignty that was to be delegated to the magistrates and

[1] John RAWLS, *La justice comme équité*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 16.

officers of the crown. They considered that the people were a collective body, possessed of a specific wisdom, whose understanding of the common good was valuable, mostly distinct from the interests of the political parties, and expressible through institutions such as the General Estates. Even though *stricto sensu* the word "Monarchomach" means "the one who fights against the monarch"2 the treatises do not advocate tyrannicide (contrary to the Ligueurs' treatises, which were a skilful appropriation of their position). Rather, the Monarchomach treatises seem to be a synthesis of the Calvinist doctrine of absolute civil obedience.

Calvin's political thought was based on two principles. First, the "Paulinian principle", according to which all political power has been ordained by God, implies that we must obey these political powers. Second, the "Petrinian principle", according to which it is better to obey God than man, implies that we must work at preserving civil peace.

According to Calvin, good works are irrelevant in the quest for salvation. His position could very well be summarized by the formula: "God does not owe us anything". Man through charity, cannot buy salvation from God, though he can lose it by acting wrongfully. Hence, the concept of political progress is absent from Calvin's thought, since the only goal of the political sphere is to preserve a minimal yet sufficient state of order so as to facilitate salvation. The idea is that even if the current political power was one that commended and undertook ethnic or religious cleansing, from the sole perspective of salvation it would still be worth more than no established power at all (that is, chaos) – for such an ordering power still allows humanity to endure "as it waits".

However, contrary to Calvin and despite their direct filiation, political progress was meaningful to the Monarchomachs. The integration of the right of resistance into the political sphere opened a median way between absolute chaos and absolute obedience. The Monarchomachs' constitutionalist approach made political progress possible while respecting civil peace. To them, there existed a third path, an alternative which embraced neither chaos nor tyranny. From

[2] From the Greek *μόναρχος* (monarchos – "monarch, sole ruler") and *μάχομαι* ("makomai" – "to fight").

this perspective, there is still a problem to be found in the right of active resistance. Though resistance respects the Calvinist premise of preserving civil peace (the Petrinian principle), it comes into contradiction with the Paulinian principle, that is, the deference due to God through deference to established political power. In fact, to resist means to bring the legitimacy of the political order into question – thus, indirectly, God's will. Therefore, allowing a right of resistance requires a rupture of the indirect link between God's will and the political order. In other words, the Paulinian principle found in Calvin must be abandoned. But such a conceptual shift is not without consequences: the political sphere thereby becomes self-sufficient, and exists independently of God.

Even though the Huguenots, as a persecuted minority, had to be protected by means of resistance, such a political necessity remained in line with their theological frame. As was stated earlier, peace had to be maintained in preparation for salvation. But Calvin made civil peace subsumed to the duty to obey God, whereas the Monarchomachs no longer linked the two premises together. Only the perspective of salvation was taken into account, thereby discarding the question of the indirect obedience due to God. We may note here that the deference due to God belongs to a deontological type of argument, whereas the salvation perspective belongs to a more consequentialist approach.

For the Monarchomachs, the acceptance of the imperfection of the human condition did not lead them to believe that one must suffer tyranny with *patience*. The emphasis they placed on political necessity contained in itself a practical philosophy that was far from Calvin's. Calvin's main interest was in the ideal of a contemplative life, in which each individual would possess the precepts of the good life within themselves, and where nobody would need to bother with politics. But realistically speaking, the Huguenots were bound to resist. Because of this practical necessity, the Monarchomach treatises tended to focus more on the question of good governance than on how the "vrai chrestien" should carry out his contemplations. This said, we are inevitably led to wonder if the emphasis placed on the political sphere in the discourse of the Huguenot Monarchomachs is evidence of a rupture from Calvin's political thought.

My answer will be three-fold. First, I will show that Calvin's

theological framing of politics fundamentally inspired the Monarchomach position. In this sense, the Monarchomach works appear to be a systematization of Calvin's position on theology and politics. Second, I will take into account the strongly political nature of the Monarchomach treatises as grounds for the statement that they indeed present a rupture from Calvin's political thought. The function of good works will provide a good heuristic in this matter. I will show that an internal reading of the Monarchomach corpus is not enough to confirm or refute this "rupture" hypothesis. Finally, I will show that in spite of how valuable the question of good works is for providing a heuristic by which to address the debate and compare Calvin's and the Monarchomachs' political ideas, such a heuristic forces us to study theology and politics as separate. The Monarchomach treatises are indeed very political, but they also aim at a political performance with regard to the theological ideal of a contemplative life. Therefore, it is difficult to prove whether there is indeed a rupture from Calvin. This is why we need to comprehend the theological and the political matters as complementary, rather than mutually opposed. The two spheres are to be thought as a coherent whole, yet divided into two realms, one of ends and one of means. The Monarchomach treatises distanced themselves from Calvin through the pragmatism of their political philosophy, which was completely absent from Calvin's political thought. In sum, the rupture was not made on the level of the *link* between ends and means. The Monarchomachs were not trying to redefine this link. They simply studied and expanded the practical aspect of a fundamentally theological thought, probably motivated in this endeavour by the violent geopolitical context of the religious wars.

1. "The obedience due to God is paramount" The theological argument, from Calvin to the Monarchomachs

1.1. Calvin prepared the way for the possibility of resistance

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obey God than man, implies that we must work at preserving civil peace.

After Adam committed the Original Sin and was banished from Eden, all our knowledge of God was lost, including our ability to act in agreement with His will. In sum, we found ourselves unable to define the "Good". Does this imply that we cannot be held responsible for our sins? Of course not. For God granted us "common grace", whereby we were given partial knowledge, namely, knowledge of what is "evil". On this note, Calvin writes: « *Le Seigneur restreint par sa providence la perversité de notre nature à ce qu'elle ne se jette point hors des gonds, mais il ne la purge pas au dedans »*[3]. Thus, the Creator did not let his creation fall so low that he should wallow in chaos[4]. Calvin conceives of the political sphere not as a product of man, but as a gift from God.

According to Chenevière, Calvin believed that the needs for which the political hierarchy was created was not enough to justify its existence: « Certes l'État est là à cause du péché, mais le péché n'en est pas la cause véritable : il en est plutôt l'occasion ; sa cause véritable est en Dieu »[5]. God provides man with political order for two reasons: to preserve the human kind, and to give men a taste of the beatitude that exists in heaven. *« Nous sommes avertis d'aimer l'état de justice connaissant que c'est un don singulier de Dieu et un moyen de conserver le genre humain »*. The political sphere must be comprehended as a means chosen by God for the salvation of man. Such is, therefore, the root of the doctrine of absolute obedience: *« La volonté du Seigneur est telle que nous cheminions sur terre cependant que nous aspirons à notre vrai pays, davantage si telles aides [the policital institutions] sont nécessaires à notre*

[3] Italicized quotations are of Calvin, as they appear in Chenevière's text. Those in Roman style are from Chenevière himself. It was impossible to verify whether Chenevière used Calvin's words in respect to their context, for the late XIXth century edition of Calvin's Oeuvres Complètes in 59 volumes which Chenevière used as his reference could not be found in Montreal, and Chenevière's reference system did not allow us to study the selected quotations using a different edition.

[4] Marc-Édouard CHENEVIÈRE, *La pensée politique de Calvin*, Genève, Reda (1970), 1937, p. 71-73.

[5] Calvin never speaks in terms of "State". Chenevière justifies the use of this term by saying it simplifies the reading.

voyage, ceux qui les veulent séparer de l'homme lui ôtent sa nature humaine »[6].

The legitimacy of the political order is beyond our judgment. If the monarch proves to be iniquitous, no subject is allowed to resist, because this would mean resisting God's will. Calvin preached *patience*, unto death if necessary. This way, one is assured not to lose his place in heaven (which could not, as was previously mentioned, be gained by good works, but only lost, as was proposed by Erasmus).

> Vous n'êtes points armés de lui [Dieu] pour résister à ceux qui sont établis de lui pour gouverner… que reste-t-il donc ? Je n'y vois autre refuge, sinon qu'en vous dépouillant de toutes vos afflictions et remettant vos vies en la main de celui qui a promis d'en être gardien, vous attendiez paisiblement le conseil qu'il vous donnera…, encore est-ce qu'il vous faille résister jusqu'au sang, pensez que vaut cette vie céleste, laquelle nous est apprêtée à telle condition que nous passions par ce monde comme laissant un pays étrange pour parvenir à notre vrai héritage[7]

Obedience, by its very definition, guarantees that there will be no opposition to God's will. Perfect obedience, moreover, requires that one pray for the tyrants. In anachronistic terms: Calvin introduced a distinction between the politician and his function—the person and their duty. Calvin believed the deference due to duties were inalienable, for they were the manifestation of God's will. Here, the deference due to the person, as opposed to their function, was enforced only to avoid all ambiguity.

In addition to this theological argument, Chenevière sees two "good reasons" for obedience. First, probably formulated as an argument against the Anabaptist movement, tyranny, as barbaric as it may be, is better than anarchy: *« Car encore qu'il y ait des diables encharnés qui occupent le siège de justice, combien qu'ils s'efforcent à mal faire, si est-ce que*

[6] "It is the Lord's will that we walk our path on earth while aspiring to our true country, and that if such aides [the political institutions] are necessary to our journey, those who wish to strip man of them also strip from him his humanity." In *Ibid.*, p. 140-143.

[7] Letter to the Church of Angers, mentioned in *ibid.*, p. 313-314.

Dieu ne leur permet point de venir jusque-là qu'ils renversent toute justice : il faut qu'il y ait encore quelques traces de bien »[8]. Second, a people receive the government they deserve, and God cannot be held responsible for the sins of human beings. In this matter, we may notice an ambiguity. Our actions seem to influence the way God's will manifests itself here on earth. This seems to be a statement of the obvious. However, such a fact remains nonetheless irrelevant to our study, as we are only concerned with the link between good works and salvation—not good works and conditions of life. These secular considerations on the goodness of obedience were a side issue for Calvin. Chenevière sees Calvin's doctrine of absolute obedience as essentially based on a theological motive, namely, salvation. Thus, actions do matter if they are analogous to sins. This resembles the Augustinian doctrine, according to which men are responsible for evil and God is responsible for good.

Max Engammare does not put this interpretation into question, for it was based on Calvin's most theoretical work, *L'institution chrestienne*. However, Engammare highlights an ambiguity by showing that in a few of his lectures the Reformer explicitly advocated active resistance: *« Mais quand ils [les tyrans] s'esleveront contre Dieu, il faut qu'ils soient mis en bas, et qu'on ne tienne plus d'eux non plus de savattes… »*[9]. In other words, the iniquitous monarch must be taken down, that is, *deposed. «Il faudra que ceux qui leur doivent estre subjectz s'eslevent et les tiennent comme captifz, et attachez »*[10]. This part of Calvin's position on the right of resistance could not have been suspected by Chenevière, says Engammare, as he was not aware of the series of violent

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 316.

[9] Cf. Sermon 9 on Daniel 6, 22-24, quotation from Max ENGAMMARE, "Calvin monarchomaque ? Du soupçon à l'argument", in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation history*, vol. 89, 1998, p. 214, already quoted in Émile DOUMERGUE, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps,* t.5 (note 5) p. 436.

[10] "Whenever the ruler or the magistrates depart from their duty toward God, the subjects are bound to protest against them, and hold them captive." Cf. Sermon on 2 Samuel 19, November 13th 1562 quoted in Max ENGAMMARE, "Calvin monarchomaque ? Du soupçon à l'argument", in Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation history, vol. 89, 1998.

sermons Engammare himself later discovered[11].

However, these sermons never allowed for a private right of resistance. There exists one sermon which might seem to favour private forms of resistance, in which individuals were explicitly urged to "oppose evil and resist it". But Engammare shows that the sermon's argument was derived rather from a social principle of the just life, and was in total agreement with the Christian precept to "love thy neighbour". In this perspective, resistance at most took the form of acts of charity—but it would never go so far as to become violent. Besides, the rest of the sermon in question reveals clearly that Calvin had no intention of mobilizing his audience for violent resistance in a context of civil disobedience[12].

Engammare sees Calvin as an active defender of the right of resistance against a ruler who erred from God's law. But the right of resistance which Calvin had in mind in no way applied to the private individual. Engammare even goes further, and states that in the event that the political power's orders came into conflict with the Decalogue's prescription, or ran counter to what our conscience dictates under the influence of common grace, the Petrinian principle had to be followed: Obey God before men. In this circumstance, it was the duty of the subject to resist, even in a private capacity[13]. Though it wasn't yet systematic, we can see here how Calvin set the foundation for a position in favour of the right of resistance. But his exact position remains unclear.

1.2. The Monarchomachs systematized the possibility of resistance

In 1536, Calvin published *L'institution chrestienne* and developed his doctrine of absolute obedience. But in the face of the escalating religious wars that reached their paroxysm in 1572 with the first Saint-Bartholomew massacres[14], the Huguenots had to take action

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 215.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 224-225.
[14] It seems largely agreed upon that there were two Saint-Bartholomew massacres. The first was the assassination of the Huguenot chiefs in Paris. The second refers to the popular massacres, sometimes explained by a form of mass hysteria which lasted several weeks in the French provinces. See,

against the tyranny that spread out before their eyes. The salient fact is that the King of France, Charles IX, officially shouldered responsibility for the assassination of the Huguenot chief, the admiral Coligny, a few days after the bloody night of August 24th, 1572[15]. Therefore, even if the Guise family had fomented this episode, imposture was no longer the only problem concerning the ruling power: the king had officially involved himself in this despotic violence. Thus the need arose to legitimize active resistance, even against the monarch. The Protestant minority had to be safeguarded

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among others, Joël CORNETTE, *Le Livre et le Glaive – Chronique de la France au XVIe siècle*, Paris, Armand Colin / Sedes, 1999, (p. 424-438), who mentions the Monarchomach treatises in his analysis of the events.

[15] 1)Philippe ERLANGER, *Le massacre de la Saint-Barthélémy*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, writes: "Le 26 août (...) du haut des coussins fleurdelysés où son père ordonna de saisir Anne Dubourg, Charles IX, après avoir dénoncé le complot huguenot, se déclare le seul auteur de l'exécution. Il affirme même l'avoir prémédité. Ces flots de sang ont coulé parce qu'il l'a voulu." (p. 177, Floch, 1981)

2) Denis CROUZET, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélémy*, Paris, Fayard, 1994, (p. 420), verifies this assumption in a more detailed and convincing way. "Le mercredi 27, la ville est toujours en sédition (...) Ordre est donné à tous les hommes en charge de l'ordre public de faire publier l'interdiction de prendre les armes, sur peine de la vie. Tout contrevenant à l'édit de paix de 1570 devra être impérativement et immédiatement châtié (...). Complémentairement, une "Déclaration ou Ordonnance" est rendue publique. Elle vise expressément à arrêter la pulsion de mort qui s'est emparée de Paris [il y a bel et bien eu deux Saint-Barthélémy, l'une assassinat politique, l'autre, hystérie collective] et qui risque de s'étendre à tout le royaume. Le roi veut enseigner à ses sujets la "cause" de la mort de l'amiral et de ses complices. Il proclame que c'est sur son ordre propre que "l'exécution" a eu lieu, et il faut en chercher l'explication non pas dans la "religion" ou dans la volonté de donner une fin aux édits de pacification. Il y a eu complot huguenot contre la majesté royale, un complot qui a été légitimement puni. Mais cette révélation n'empêche pas l'autorité monarchique d'informer "tous les gentilshommes et autres quelconques de la religion prétendue réformée qu'elle veut et entend qu'en toute sûreté et liberté ils puissent vivre et demeurer avec leurs femmes, enfants et familles en leurs maisons sous la protection dudit seigneur Roi". Aucune persécution contre les réformés ne devra être tolérée."

against a potentially uncontrolled use of violence. De Bèze, Hotman, and Junius Brutus were three principal actors in defining how such a right of resistance could be legitimately exercised without going against the Protestant faith.

With Calvin, active resistance was possible only within the political sphere. But such a position is unclear, since an illegitimate use of violence could very well be considered political. The clarification provided by the Monarchomachs became to specify that active resistance was legitimate as long as it stayed constitutional. Among other things, they managed to arrive at a relative consensus on the definition of the "tyrant", and distinguished him from the "usurper". Most importantly, a description of the modalities allowing the right of resistance was drawn in order to ensure that this right did not undermine the established political order, thereby avoiding anarchy on the one hand, while respecting Calvin's Paulinian principle on the other. For all three authors, resistance was permitted against the usurper as well as the "invader" (the foreign tyrant), even in a private capacity. The only exception to this was if the usurper or invader enjoyed popular assent. There were divergences, though, concerning resistance against domestic tyrants—that is, those who had received their power legitimately, in accordance with the ways and customs (such as heredity), but who made bad use of it.

In compliance with their Calvinist filiation, none of the three Monarchomachs allowed a private right of resistance in the case of the domestic tyrant. For Hotman, the right of resistance belonged solely to the "general estates". De Bèze allotted this right to the high magistrates in 1560 (*Confession de la foy chrestienne*, 1560), and proved more generous in 1574, extending it to the lower magistrates, that is, highborn aristocrats, as well as elected magistrates like mayors (*Du droit des magistrats*, 1574). In this last text, De Bèze explained that the right of resistance becomes a duty to resist when all pacific options have failed[16]. Junius Brutus rather insisted that resistance should be exercised by lower magistrates[17]. An important exception must be

[16] Théodore DE BÈZE, *Droit des Magistrats* (1574), Droz, Genève, 1970, p. 19

[17] Robert Kingdon attributes the theoretical distance between Junius Brutus and Calvin to the fact that Junius Brutus, aka Duplessis-Mornay, was not as close to him as De Bèze and Hotman – starting with the fact that he did not

highlighted though: all three men shared the opinion that, as with the usurper and the invader, the domestic tyrant could not be resisted if he enjoyed public assent.

The idea was that as long as resistance was exercised by a magistrate, political order was preserved. Thus, as long as resistance remained constitutional, that is, practiced by a magistrate, such a resistance was not on the edges of politics. Resistance was itself a power willed by God.

Nevertheless, is active resistance necessarily a manifestation of God's will? Private initiative could, indirectly, have a role to play regarding God's manifestation here below.[18] The question would

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live in Geneva, contrary to the others. See Robert KINGDON, "Introduction" to the edition of *Droit des Magistrats*, Théodore de Bèze (1574), Droz, Genève, 1970.

[18] A magnificient formulation of this question can be found in Marguerite Yourcenar's novel, *L'Œuvre au Noir*. The author makes Zenon, a skeptic philosopher, and the Prayer of the Cordelier, agonising a faithful man in his last hours, converse. The dying Prayer shares his doubts about some of the Roman Church's dogmas, whom he has been part of his life during.

« — Nous doutons, dit le prieur de sa voix soudain tremblante, nous avons douté… Pendant combien de nuits ai-je repoussé l'idée que Dieu n'est au-dessus de nous qu'un tyran ou qu'un monarque incapable, et que l'athée qui le nie est le seul homme qui ne blasphème pas… Puis, une lueur m'est venue ; la maladie est une ouverture. Si nous nous trompions en postulant Sa toute-puissance, et en voyant dans nos maux l'effet de Sa volonté ? Si c'était à nous d'obtenir que Son règne arrive ? J'ai dit naguère que Dieu se délègue ; je vais plus loin, Sébastien. Peut-être n'est-Il dans nos mains qu'une petite flamme qu'il dépend de nous d'alimenter et de ne pas laisser éteindre ; peut-être sommes-nous la pointe la plus avancée à laquelle Il parvienne… Combien de malheureux qu'indigne la notion de Son omnipotence accourraient du fond de leur détresse si on leur demandait de venir en aide à la faiblesse de Dieu ?

— Voilà qui s'accorde fort mal avec les dogmes de la Sainte Église.

— Non, mon ami ; j'abjure d'avance tout ce qui déchirerait un peu plus la robe sans couture. Dieu règne omnipotent, je le veux bien, dans le monde des esprits, mais nous sommes ici dans le monde des corps. Et sur cette terre où Il a marché, comment L'avons-nous vu, si ce n'est comme un innocent sur la paille, tout pareil aux nourrissons gisant sur la neige dans nos villages de la Campine dévastée par les troupes du Roi, comme un vagabond

then be: why are the magistrates allowed to resist while the rest of the subjects are not? Whatever the answer may be, the fact is that actions aimed at civil peace do contribute to making salvation more accessible, without regards to who performs them. In this matter, salvation is the "supreme good", and justice is an utilitarian and egalitarian concept that aims at making the supreme good accessible to the largest number. Here, the Monarchomachs would stand far from the Calvinist assumption that the political sphere is a gift of God. They would even make political progress possible, whereas this notion had no place in Calvin's political thought.

2. The role played by good works in the manifestation of God's will: The political argument of the Monarchomachs leads to a rupture with Calvin on the question of good works

The Monarchomach thesis posits that resistance is possible if, and only if, it is performed by magistrates. This ensures that both the Paulinian and Petrinian principles, which are at the foundation of Calvin's political thought, are respected. However, De Bèze and Hotman being Calvin's direct spiritual heirs, it seems legitimate to wonder if their treatises, in which politics are considered autonomous from God, operate as a rupture from Calvin, for whom civil obedience was justified by its indirect relation to God. Such an assumption proves wrong, mainly for two reasons.

2.1. The Monarchomach thesis subscribes to a theologically oriented intellectual perspective

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n'ayant pas une pierre où reposer sa tête, comme un supplicié pendu à un carrefour et se demandant lui aussi pourquoi Dieu l'a abandonné ? Chacun de nous est bien faible, mais c'est une consolation de penser qu'Il est plus impuissant et plus découragé encore, et que c'est à nous de L'engendrer et de Le sauver dans les créatures… Je m'excuse, dit-il en toussant. Je vous ai fait le sermon que je ne peux plus faire en chaire. » (Marguerite YOURCENAR, *L'Œuvre au Noir*, Paris, Folio, 1976, p. 276-278).

Firstly, nowhere do the Monarchomach treatises say that we must obey political powers *because* their source is in God. They remind the reader that it is a duty to obey God, and also that it is a duty to obey the political order. It may be assumed that since the two types of obedience are not explicitly dependent on one another, the Monarchomachs differ from Calvin. But neither do the treatises say that the political order is the product of man's work alone. God is still the source of the rules of justice, as De Bèze writes in the opening of his *Droit des magistrats*: *« Il n'y a autre volonté que celle de un seul Dieu qui soit perpetuelle et immuable, reigle de toute justice. C'est donc luy seul auquel nous sommes tenus d'obeir sans aucune exception. »*[19]. Moreover, De Bèze was Calvin's right-hand man, and he worked in collaboration with Hotman in Geneva[20]. We therefore have to assume that the Monarchomachs subscribed to Calvin's justification of civil obedience, and working through this assumption, we must admit the implication that *both* the Paulinian and Petrinian principles remain the basic premises of the argument.

Secondly, one could argue that the object treated by the Monarchomachs was strictly political, for it essentially dealt with the question of good governance. The partition with Calvin would here consist in being interested only in the political dimension of good works, whose incidence is secular, rather than in their incidence regarding salvation.

Mellet believes that the political discourse of the treatises diminished the importance of the Paulinian principle, because it included elements in favour of popular sovereignty. Consequently, political power was no longer limited by the divine laws alone, but also by man's action. The Monarchomachs' goal would be deeper than a simple clarification on the possibility of resistance, then. They aimed at restricting political power back to the function for which it had been instituted: public good. In this sense their reasoning was strictly political. Mellet sees in this political objective an explanation for Junius Brutus' developments on the origins of political power as not only divine (as Calvin believed), but also popular. But to state that the Monarchomach treatises restricted themselves to the political

[19] Théodore DE BÈZE, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.
[20] Robert KINGDON, *Op. cit.*, p. XXVII-XXIX.

dimension would be to ignore another function of the political hierarchy, that is, to provide and preserve the necessary earthly conditions in the prospect of salvation. The goal is therefore two-fold, both political and theological. One could even argue that the theological objective outweighs the political one. Hence, what seemed to be a strictly political argument has become ambiguous, since the question of good governance, as we have found, is equally motivated by theological aspirations. The hypothesis that these treatises present a rupture from Calvinist thinking, which seemed obvious at first, has now become more difficult to confirm.

According to Mellet, the Monarchomachs did not consider monarchy to be bad in itself. On the contrary, they were bound to the monarchical form of government for theological reasons. "All place the people alongside God, at the centre of the problem of the origins of monarchical power. They are, on the one hand, those who elect or depose the king (directly or indirectly), and, on the other, those for which the king exercises his power (for the public good); in sum, with God, they are the starting point and finality of political power".[21] The power restriction they were trying to establish was rather aimed at rehabilitating monarchy. Even though their argument was principally political and their method sometimes borrowed from history or law, we cannot dissociate the treatises from their fundamentally theological background. There are certainly elements of rupture with Calvin, but an internal reading of the treatises provides no answers as to whether they outweigh the equally observable elements of continuity. An external reading could prove more helpful by working with the hypothesis of a rhetorical use of history and law. But as we shall see further, it does not.

Chenevière, for his part, argues that the Monarchomachs' questions on good governance did not arise from Calvin's influence,

[21] « Tous placent le peuple à côté de Dieu, au centre du problème de l'origine du pouvoir monarchique. Il est à la fois celui qui élit ou dépose le roi (directement ou indirectement), et celui pour lequel le pouvoir est exercé (le bien public) ; en somme, avec Dieu, point de départ et finalité du pouvoir politique » in Paul-Alexis MELLET, " 'Le roy des mouches à miel…': tyrannie présente et royauté parfaite dans les traités monarchomaques protestants (vers 1560-vers 1580)" in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation history*, vol. 93, 2002, p. 85-86.

for the implications of such questions contradicted his system. Rather, these elements would be attributed to other medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua or Nicholas of Kues[22].

2.2. The Monarchomach political gesture

Though the implicit motive of the treatises was theological, their explicit content was exclusively political. While their guideline was to participate in the Reformation movement, the Monarchomachs focused specifically on the subject of resistance and the theological grounding of their argument was never made explicit. Faced with the necessity to protect the faithful minority they belonged to, the Monarchomachs needed to differentiate the tyrant from the good Prince. Such a position seems to regard good works as catalyst for political progress. However, we have seen that an internal reading of the treatises does not give us any reason to see their treatment of good works as predominantly political. An external reading, however, in which we see the publication of these treatises as itself a political act, may lead to a more positive answer. The thesis of the treatises will here be examined in relation to their political aim.

Mellet finds a triple definition of tyranny in the Monarchomach corpus: tyrannical power is used in an absolute, violent, and uncontrolled way. Contrary to Calvin, who did not explicitly distinguish the person from the political function borne by the person, the Monarchomachs desacralized the king. The man whom we named king and his function as king were shown as two different things[23]. Therefore, while avoiding making the anachronistic mistake of falling into constructivist terminology, we could say that the Monarchomach treatises served as a gesture, or "fact", aimed at actively participating in the evolution of the political sphere.

The question of good governance was not of Calvin's concern, since government was ordained by God and consequently transcended man's judgment. The very act of proposing a theoretical framework able to assess whether or not a government is good, and

[22] Marc-Édouard CHENEVIÈRE, *ibid.*, p. 321 [note 2].
[23] Paul-Alexis MELLET, *ibid.*, p. 80-81.

thereby implying that such a framework is possible to create, was in itself quite far from Calvin. It also revealed a desire to improve the political situation. This may be due to the fact that private self-defense was not sufficient to resist the popular shape the massacres following Saint-Bartholomew's took. The responsibility for the *popular* massacres was not claimed by the political power of the day, but they were not prevented either. The political sphere, regardless of its divine origin, had proven imperfect. The Monarchomach gesture rose from the need to complete what had been given by God. At this point, we are without a doubt far from Calvin's path.

And as we move further and further from that path laid by Calvin, we may ask yet another question: had the Monarchomachs given up the Paulinian principle altogether? The publication of the treatises itself reveals a strong faith in man's ability to perfect the political sphere. This implies at least a partial autonomy from God's will, which in turn suggests a positive answer to our question. However, the act of perfecting the political sphere is not something one does in order to secure one's own salvation; God does not owe us anything. At best, it is aimed at facilitating the possibility for salvation in general. Hence, we find ourselves again caught between the treatises' two principal dimensions, namely their theological aims and their political character, and we are still unable to give precedence to one over the other.

2.3 The treatises' ambiguity can be outlined through their treatment of private resistance

The argument in favour of the right of resistance is rooted in both a political and a theological frame. The right of resistance cannot be solely political because of the theological motives underlying it. But it cannot be solely theological either, because that would make it acceptable for anyone and everyone to resist in a private capacity by claiming to act in communion with God, for instance, and thereby making their private resistance legitimate. But private resistance based on an extraordinary vocation ordered by God creates a drift that violates political hierarchy, leading to anarchy and a breach of the peace, and consequently inhibits the possibility of salvation. As Crouzet puts it, this drift, as it was theoretically framed by the time in

which the Monarchomachs wrote their treatises, presented a potential danger, especially when considered in relation to their English counterparts, Goodman and Knox, for whom private resistance was natural on the basis that the individual is able to judge the legitimacy of a political order. Yet, the drift was not potentially dangerous on theoretical grounds alone. We may recall very real instances (at least were they perceived as such) of this potential danger: the Anabaptist movement, which was considered by many to be an anarchist threat, and also, from 1560 onwards, the many isolated attempts of tyrannicide justified on the basis of a celestial calling[24]. From Calvin's point of view, the ambiguity here considered was internal to the discourse: God orders the political sphere, but the political sphere disposes of partial autonomy so that the political and the theological powers do not interfere. Hence, high magistrates, but also popular liberators, invaders and lower magistrates, were ministers of God, and as such, could resist in a constitutional way[25]. The Monarchomachs used this frame and applied it to the peculiar question of resistance, thereby supplementing his thesis with an accurate technical vocabulary.

But the Monarchomachs also allowed a private right of resistance under certain circumstances, which seems inconsistent with what has just been said. Their argument was justified by the fact that private resistance was prohibited in the case of an invader or usurper who holds popular assent. But the question of how God's will manifests itself remains unanswered. Could not the invaders or usurpers be sent by God? And conversely, is it not impossible that an individual embody God's will or follow His calling (like Joan of Arc, who is typically said to have been ordered by God to fight in the Hundred Years' War in the popular tales)? In sum, the question rather seems to be: who shall judge which actions are God's will and which are man's?

The Monarchomachs remained very ambiguous when it came to the relation between good works and the manifestation of God's will.

[24] Denis CROUZET, "Calvinism and the Uses of the Political and the religious", in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585*, p. 99-113, 1999, p. 105.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 101-106.

But such an ambiguity was only in partial rupture with Calvin's idea of a political sphere subsumed to the theological one. It seems out of our reach to resolve this ambiguity as long as we keep using an analytical frame that differentiates the political from the theological. It is above all a methodological distinction allowing to categorize the Monarchomach gesture and its arguments. A work of reunification has to be done in order to understand how the two spheres are related to each other, and further, to give an account of how the Monarchomach corpus should be understood, despite its formal tensions.

Private resistance motivated by extraordinary vocation would not be a problem in the ideal of a contemplative life where all would carry the precepts of the good life. But in such an ideal world, politics, and *a fortiori* resistance itself, would have no reason to exist either. Both the public good and the possibility of salvation would be naturally safeguarded. Mellet suggests that the Monarchomachs' political ideology was deeply nostalgic, and adds that their aim was much more a reformation of the present according to a vague model of the past than a historical understanding or a discussion on the sources of political power[26]. The political sphere's only reason of existence is to facilitate the practice of faith, ideally leading to a global community of "true Christians". Following Mellet's argument, the political aspects of the Monarchomach treatises are a means aimed at a two-sided end that will manifest itself on both the secular and the celestial planes, through the conversion of all men to the "true religion" in the former, and through salvation in the latter. The Reformation movement is proselyte by definition, and politics, though not the slightest, is to be considered a simple means.

3. The Monarchomach discourse as a political gesture: A language performance in preparation for a theological end

3.1. The aporia about the role of human action in the manifestation of God's will cannot be resolved

[26] Paul-Alexis MELLET, *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

While the rupture with Calvin on the subject of good works did not happen within his politico-theological system, it is clear that the Monarchomachs intended to affect the political sphere when they published their treatises. Therefore, the insufficiency of Calvin's conception of the political sphere is acknowledged, though the acknowledgment is not formal but factual. The individual has a role to play in the improvement of the political sphere, and the Monarchomach discourse *de facto* proves it, thereby making it a political fact. We tried previously to argue the position that the Monarchomach treatises were strictly political, then that they were strictly theological; for this we used the heuristic of good works, and more precisely, we examined the question of private resistance. It seems impossible to reduce the Monarchomach argument to either one or the other of the two spheres. The Monarchomach discourse appears to be a *political gesture* in the service of a *theological end*.

3.2. The distinction between the theological and the political is an artificial one

According to Crouzet and Kingdon, the Monarchomach treatises prepared the Huguenot's future by establishing an official political position, for the ambiguities left by Calvin on the meaning of good works had contributed to divide the Protestant movement.

Mellet seems to settle the aporia concerning good works when he says that the end of politics is both in God and in the people. Calvin thought as a theologian, and consequently had as little interest for politics as he could. His particular way of being interested in politics must not be ignored as we read the Monarchomachs. Beyond a search for political equilibrium, the Reformation movement, in which the Monarchomachs took part, was ultimately a redefinition of the moral values with respect to "real Christianity". Politics were a gift of God, and were seen as a simple means to salvation. This implied that politics were subsumed under the theological sphere, and they remained a means to promote the Christian ideal of the good life. The Monarchomachs were morally conservative in this way, for their aim was to return back to the original purity of faith. It follows that their political thesis was a means to achieve this goal, and was progressive not from a moral standpoint but from a practical one.

The idea of moral or political progress would be irrelevant in a world where each and every person was a "true Christian", life on earth being transitional and its meaning to be found in God.

Our question on the meaning of good works may be solved if we consider the Monarchomach thesis as subscribing to the expansionist character of the Reformation. Their thesis may be considered politically prudent only because the Protestants were a minority in XVIth century France. From a practical perspective, it would seem absurd to advocate the establishment of a Calvinist monarchy before possessing the power to defend such a statement, for the immediate consequence of doing so would simply be to frighten the powers-that-be and increase repression—neither of which was in the Protestant minority's interest. However, the theoretical goal in its ideal was to institute the true faith everywhere and ultimately to commune with God – to redeem man from Adam's fall and thereby render politics obsolete. The earthly secular world would then be regulated by faith. According to Kingdon, the Monarchomach treatises were created within an unfavourable political context, which the treatises attempted to overcome in the short term, and modify in the long term. While we lack the ability to take a stance on the ambiguous position of the Monarchomachs concerning good works, we can nonetheless see with certainty that their treatises were aimed above all at political performance.

4. Conclusion

It appears impossible to take a stance on the theological meaning of good works in the Monarchomach corpus, in large part because the treatises present themselves more as a political discourse than as a theological system. From an internal point of view of the treatises, we have seen that the cause of this problem was the ambiguous relation inherited from Calvin between the theological and political spheres. It is understandable that a few inescapable tensions appear from an internal perspective, for the systematization of Calvin's position on the right of resistance undertaken by the Monarchomachs did not necessitate the creation of a perfectly coherent system. But it remains that we have found no justification for the possibility of resistance within a doctrine of absolute

obedience. Unfortunately, an external reading of the treatises is no more helpful, for the multiplicitous explanations for this ambiguous relation present themselves more as obstacles than as aids in trying to settle the relationship between the political and the theological aims of the treatises. Firstly, in terms of influence, the Monarchomachs agreed with Calvin's predominantly theological position, but supplements to his political philosophy appear in their treatises, which we may trace back to other contemporary philosophers, as well as some medieval thinkers. Secondly, their historical and geopolitical contexts provide an explanation for a few of the treatises' aspects, such as their rhetorical character. No evaluation is possible on these grounds, however, the qualitative aspects of their intellectual and historical backgrounds being hardly comparable, but in fact complementary. The Monarchomach treatises appear to be a sort of compromise between an immediately unreachable theological ideal and the practical necessity of politics. While it does little to resolve the ambiguity concerning the role of man's works in the manifestation of God's will, an external reading of the treatises at least offers a wider perspective on the matter by providing both its intellectual and geopolitical contexts. In any case, that they may be ambiguous on some points does not lessen the value of the texts from a historical perspective. Their ambivalent relationship to Calvinist thought, expressed through a combination of appropriation and rupture, contributes to the formalization and development of the concept of resistance, and thereby to the emergence of the idea of "mixed government".

Future research may enrich the history of political ideas by examining the potential link between Calvin, the Monarchomachs, and the so-called liberal meta-paradigm in current political philosophy, which defines the good through a generally institutionalized compromise of the different conceptions of the good available in society. Though inspired from metaphysical premises, Calvin put forward a rough yet analogous moral philosophy when, lacking a more substantial definition of the good, he commended *patience*. However, the doctrine he founded quickly led to a dead-end when it was confronted by the necessity for political action. The Monarchomachs were those who saw the need for a parallel solution aimed at developing institutional mechanisms

which, while remaining constitutional, prevented and limited the violence that rose out of the political conflicts of the day. The shift observed here could be used as a first step toward highlighting a premodern root for the "negative freedom" conception to be found in the upcoming classical liberal political thought.

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