
This book traces the political theory of the idea of resistance from the publication of Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion* (1536) to the aftermath of the massacres of St. Bartholomew (1572), and it fully reviews the rich literature on the question. Its purpose is to make textually more precise the chronology of the evolution of political ideas: “We understand a political idea as a sort of conceptual atom or molecule which can be identified as ideology and a theoretical system.” It follows the “externalist approach” of Georges Weill, which examines texts and traces in them “the reciprocal influence of events on theories and theories on events.” Weill was followed by J. W. Allen, W. F. Church, and especially Pierre Mesnard, whose method was comparative and who tried to present a portrait describing “the great movement of thought in which is constructed the whole political philosophy in which we still live today.” The author has assembled a group of eighteen mostly anonymous texts published between 1559 and 1572 to illustrate, according to a “dialogical hermeneutic” method, the “conceptual issue of the Huguenots” and the progression of political ideas.

Mindful of the Anabaptist uprising, Calvin taught passive resistance to a sovereign who issued a law against the commandments of God. This was in keeping with Saint Paul’s “rendering to Caesar,” but the advice of Saint Peter was to obey the commands of God rather than man, though Calvin dedicated his work to Francis I and maintained an “ethic of obedience.” However, this orthodox attitude, equivocal to begin with, was changing after the death of the king, as his Huguenot supporters moved toward violence. At his accession in 1547 Henry II renewed efforts to suppress Protestant heresy, but by then the nobility was infected by the ideas being imported from Geneva. The ambiguity of Calvin’s position made it possible for aristocrats in the first of the Wars of Religion to assert their honor against a king who was surrounded by Romanist nobles, including the Cardinal of Lorraine.

This influence became extreme after the death of Henry II in 1559 and the accession of the ten-year-old Charles IX. Between 1560 and 1562 Huguenots broke images, sacked churches, and pillaged monasteries. The Prince of Condé resumed the Wars of Religion and in 1560 established a “treaty of association” in order “to maintain the honor of God, the repose of the kingdom, and the government of the Queen Mother.” With lawyers joining theologians, the Huguenot nobles proclaimed support of the “ancient custom” and “fundamental laws of the kingdom” on the grounds of the captivity of the minor king by the house of Lorraine and the “tiger” (as François Hotman called the Cardinal in 1560), who headed it. As expressed in the voluminous pamphlet literature appearing in these years, Condé’s cause was based on “public welfare, liberty of conscience, and noble honor” as well as “true faith.” So Huguenot resistance moved toward an “institutionalist” idea of government.
Resistance thus became essentially political and evolved into the monarchomachic theory of resistance to tyranny, first suggested in a test of Jean de Coras. This theory was radicalized by the massacres of St. Bartholomew, along with the murder of the Admiral Coligny, which Hotman, Theodore Beza, Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, and other Protestants attributed to Queen Mother Catherine de Medici and the young king, and which led to the fourth War of Religion. Another product of this filiation of ideas was the contract theory of government based on the interdependence of the Estates General and the Crown. In fact, some publicists upheld the Estates as the senior partner in royal government. However, these ideas were the product not merely of the massacres of 1572, but, as Robert Kingdon and Ralph Giesey have shown, of the whole decade of the 1560s.

In his *Franco-Gallia* (1573) Hotman, while protesting the complicity of Charles IX in the murders of St. Bartholomew, established a contractual theory of monarchy, celebrating “that beautiful old agreement which existed in the time of our ancestors.” This was an idea taken up as well by Theodore Beza and Philippe Duplessis Mornay, and it led to a recalling of the Estates General and a defense of a “consultative monarchy” in which the Estates were superior to the monarch. But the texts anterior to Hotman, Beza, and Duplessis Mornay (1564–70) had already opened the door to these views of popular sovereignty and even federalism that had been built on Calvin’s ambiguous breakthrough.

Donald R. Kelley
Rutgers University