

Arnold Huijgen / Karin Maag (eds.)

# Calvinus frater in Domino

Papers of the Twelfth International Congress  
on Calvin Research



# Reformed Historical Theology

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Arnold Huijgen/Karin Maag (eds.)

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## Preface

In late August 2018, the International Calvin Congress gathered for its twelfth quadrennial conference, marking forty years since its inaugural gathering in 1978. We are deeply grateful to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia for hosting us. Our thanks go first and foremost to Westminster Seminary President Peter Lillback, and then to his staff and student assistants for their warm welcome. We particularly appreciated the ready expertise and assistance of Paige Poole and her team. We also want to express our profound appreciation to Bryce Craig, president of Presbyterian and Reformed Publications, for underwriting much of the cost of the conference. The Calvin Congress members, the Praesidium, and the incoming president of the International Calvin Congress also all wish to express our deepest thanks to the outgoing president, Herman Selderhuis, who has led the congress so effectively for the last sixteen years. Thank you, Herman! Finally, we wish to dedicate this volume to the memory of Irena Backus, Professor of History of the Reformation at the University of Geneva, who died in June 2019. Her outstanding research, teaching, and scholarship, and collegial encouragement to numerous Calvin scholars will live on in our memories.

The six plenary papers included in this volume all examine various aspects of Calvin's understanding of the Bible's impact on politics and freedom. The editors also received numerous submissions of revised short papers for inclusion in this volume. Unfortunately we were not able to include all the offerings. The range of topics and approaches testifies to the ongoing health of the field of Calvin studies both in North America and worldwide. We are grateful to Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht for accepting the volume in their series. Our thanks also go to Jaco van Rossum in the Netherlands and Ruan Bessa in Grand Rapids, who both provided assistance to the editors in getting the manuscript ready for print.

Once again, the title of this volume comes from one of the letters addressed to Calvin by his contemporaries. In this case, *Calvinus frater in Domino* (Calvin,

brother in the Lord) comes from the salutation in the Bernese magistrate Nikolaus Zurkinden's letter written to Calvin on August 27, 1551.

Apeldoorn and Grand Rapids, July 2019  
Arnold Huijgen and Karin Maag, editors

## Part I. Plenary Papers



Scott M. Manetsch

## John Calvin, the Monarchomachs, and the Biblical Warrant for Political Resistance

The Reformation Wall in Geneva's Parc des Bastions, completed in 1917, is a monument celebrating the important role that John Calvin and reformed Christianity played in the progress of modern Western democracy. The imposing figures of Calvin, Guillaume Farel, Theodore Beza, and John Knox stand at the center of the monument. They are flanked on either side by a massive wall, inscribed with bas-relief panels commemorating important moments in the political history of Western Europe, including Geneva's independence from Savoy (1536), the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the United Provinces (1581), the signing of the Edict of Nantes (1598), the Pilgrims' ratification of the Mayflower Compact (1620), and the presentation of the English Declaration of Rights to William and Mary (1689).<sup>1</sup> What is left unclear (and what remains controversial), however, is the precise nature of Calvin's contribution to this political tradition of liberal democracy and human rights. John T. McNeill, writing seventy years ago, argued that Calvin's stiff opposition to absolute monarchy "unbarred the gate" and unleashed a "phalanx of champions" who defended the people's rights against tyrannical government.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in his study of Sebastian Castellio, historian Roland Bainton noted that "[i]f Calvin ever wrote anything in favor of religious liberty it was a typographical error."<sup>3</sup>

In the past half century, historians and political scientists have debated at length Calvin's place on the broad arc of the development of Western political lib-

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1 See Francis Higman's illustrated booklet "The International Reformation Monument, Geneva," (n.p.). The fact that the monument also displays a panel commemorating the Puritan minister Roger Williams, who was an ardent opponent of Calvin's religious intolerance, is a paradox not lost on Roland Bainton. See Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 54–55.

2 John T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," *Church History* 18 (1949): 163.

3 Roland Bainton, ed., *Concerning Heretics, whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated ... An anonymous work attributed to Sebastian Castellio* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 74.

eralism. This tangled question has required them to explore in greater detail Calvin's political theories in light of medieval Catholic conciliarism, as well as in relation to other Protestant political theorists of the sixteenth century. Thus, for example, a sizeable body of scholarship has compared Calvin's political writings to the revolutionary tracts produced by reformed churchmen like John Ponet, John Knox, and Christopher Goodman as they opposed Catholic monarchs in Scotland and England during the 1550s and 1560s.<sup>4</sup> The influence of the Magdeburg Articles and Lutheran resistance theories in the wake of the Schmalkald War in 1547 have also commanded scholarly interest.<sup>5</sup> Probably the most attention, however, has been given to the incendiary resistance literature written by French reformed authors François Hotman, Theodore Beza, and Philippe du Plessis Mornay—the so-called three monarchomachs—in response to the massacres of St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572.<sup>6</sup> Scholars continue to debate whether the radical arguments espoused by the monarchomachs were derived primarily from Calvin, or from some other source, whether John Knox, Christopher Goodman, or even the Magdeburg Articles.

My contribution will explore continuities and discontinuities between Calvin's political thought and the radical resistance theories proposed by Hotman, Beza, and Mornay. In addition to providing a brief summary of their political proposals, I will pay special attention to the exegetical warrant provided by these reformed leaders in defense of their doctrine of the right of lesser magistrates to resist tyrannical government. To my knowledge, no scholar to date has examined carefully the *biblical* foundations of this distinctive political claim; it is here, then, that I hope to make a small contribution to the ongoing discussion of reformed resistance theories in the early modern era.

4 See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:25–30; John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights. Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118–122; Richard Gamble, “The Christian and the Tyrant: Beza and Knox on Political Resistance Theory,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 125–139; Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvinism and resistance theory,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 193–218.

5 See, for example, Cornel Zwierlein, “L'Importance de la *Confessio* de Magdebourg (1550) pour le calvinisme: un mythe historiographique?” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 67 (2005): 27–46; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 191–206.

6 The term ‘monarchomach’ was first coined by William Barclay in 1600 to describe French Protestant authors who ‘battled against the monarchy’ in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. See Gieseey, “The Monarchomach Triumvirs: Hotman, Beza and Mornay,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 32 (1970): 42 note 3. See also Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 302–338; Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 87–114, 122–141.

## Part I: Calvin's Political Thought

To understand the basic structure of John Calvin's political thought, one must begin with his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, as Matthew Tuininga has recently shown.<sup>7</sup> For Calvin, God has established two kingdoms or governments in which human beings are appointed to live, the spiritual (or eternal) kingdom and the political (or temporal) kingdom. Calvin articulates this important distinction already in the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536). "[T]here is a twofold government in man," he writes, "one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and civil life ..."<sup>8</sup> The spiritual kingdom "pertains to the life of the soul."<sup>9</sup> It is the realm of redemption in which Christ governs his church, redeems and instructs his people, and inaugurates his eschatological kingdom. It is made visible through the proclamation of the gospel and the ongoing ministry of the church.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the political or temporal kingdom is concerned with the affairs of the body and regulates outward behavior in this present age.<sup>11</sup> It is the realm of creation whereby Christ expresses his justice and general care for fallen human beings through reason, civic institutions, and human laws.<sup>12</sup> Calvin insists that these two kingdoms are separate and distinct, having different requirements, entailing different responsibilities, and achieving different purposes. Even so, these two kingdoms are neither incongruous nor incompatible; Christian men and women are citizens of both these realms and must submit to Christ's authority as expressed in each of them.

For Calvin, then, civil government is not a necessary evil, but rather a positive good, ordained by God as a partial remedy for sin and as an agent to facilitate human flourishing. Political authority is a divine calling of the utmost importance: "[N]o one ought to doubt," Calvin writes in 1536, "that civil authority is a calling [*vocatio*], not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men."<sup>13</sup> In the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, the Genevan reformer provides his fullest treatment of the chief purposes for political authority: "[C]ivil government has as

7 Matthew Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church. Christ's Two Kingdoms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 184 (6.13). Hereafter cited as *Institutes* (1536).

9 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 184 (6.13).

10 See Matthew Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 145–157, 182–185.

11 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 184 (6.13).

12 See Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 145–157.

13 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 209 (6.38).



its appointed end ... to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility.”<sup>14</sup> In response to Anabaptists and radicals who reject civil authority as superfluous or anti-theological to God’s spiritual kingdom, Calvin insists that in a fallen world, human government is necessary to preserve public order, provide social justice, protect the church, and promote external righteousness.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, Calvin asserts, political institutions are as important to human wellbeing as “bread, water, sun and air.”<sup>16</sup>

But what should be the precise relationship between civil government and the church?<sup>17</sup> This matter was of vital concern to Calvin as he constructed a church order in Geneva during the 1540s and 1550s that could withstand the prevailing winds of Erastianism that blew strong in other reformed cities such as Zurich, Basel and Strasbourg, where the magistrates dominated church life and usurped the right of excommunication.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, in Geneva’s *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541), Calvin establishes a Christian commonwealth in which religious and civil officers have jurisdiction over separate, yet complementary, spheres and are expected to cooperate with one another for the public good.<sup>19</sup> The state and church “are not contraries like water and fire, but things conjoined.”<sup>20</sup> Calvin articulates this theory of coordinate powers in some detail in subsequent editions of the *Institutes* and in his biblical commentaries. For Calvin, Christian ministers have sole authority to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, define right doctrine, and exercise church discipline—these functions belong to the church alone. On the other hand, civil magistrates have sole authority to enact public laws, punish crime, collect taxes, wage war, and conduct civil affairs—these

14 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1487 (IV.xx.2). Hereafter cited as *Institutes* (1559).

15 William R. Stevenson, Jr., “Calvin and political issues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173–174.

16 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 208 (6.37).

17 See Stevenson, “Calvin and political issues,” 175–177, and the extensive discussion in Tui-ninga, *Calvin’s Political Theology*.

18 See Scott Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors. Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26–31, 183–188. For a detailed description of Calvin’s struggle with Geneva’s civil authorities, see William Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Reprint ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

19 Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, 27.

20 John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvinii opera omnia quae supersunt*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1885), 29:659. Hereafter cited as *CO*. See John T. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin’s Thought,” *Church History* 18 (1949): 157.

functions belong to the state alone.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the church and state are expected to be of service to one another. Ministers of the gospel serve the state as they provide biblical counsel to their magistrates and denounce public policies that violate God's law. Magistrates, in turn, as custodians of both tables of the Law, are duty-bound to maintain true religion as they protect outward worship, prevent idolatry, punish blasphemers and heretics, and defend the church from her enemies.<sup>22</sup> Calvin's doctrine of coordinate powers, therefore, was a creative alternative to the political theologies of Anabaptists and Thomas Erastus, who sought either to isolate the church from the state, or subjugate the church to the state.

As should be clear by now, Calvin believes that temporal rulers have a distinct calling from God, and are accountable to him as they exercise authority.<sup>23</sup> Calvin describes them variously as "ministers of God," "ministers of divine justice," "vicars of God," and "deputies of God"—theirs is a "holy office" and a "holy ministry."<sup>24</sup> For Calvin, therefore, human government does not derive its legitimacy from the consent of the governed, but from God's ordination and wise providence.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Calvin makes clear that this divine mandate extends to different forms of human government, whether monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. Beginning in the 1543 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin expresses his strong preference for an elective aristocracy where authority is shared by a group of qualified rulers committed to restraining injustice and holding one other accountable to the public law.<sup>26</sup> This preference for collective rule based on election intensified during Calvin's later years, as he became increasingly critical of Europe's monarchs who defied the rule of law and raged against the church.<sup>27</sup> "If one could uncover the hearts of kings," Calvin complains in 1561, we would find that "hardly one in a hundred does not ... despise everything divine."<sup>28</sup> And yet, every form of human government is imperfect. And whatever form of gov-

21 Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights*, 75; Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), 1215–1216, 1485–1489 (IV.xi.3–4; IV.xx.1–3).

22 Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), 1487–1489 (IV.xx.2–3). See Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 232–233, 253, 280–281.

23 Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 209 (6.39).

24 Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), 1491–1492 (IV.xx.6).

25 Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 343.

26 Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), 1493–1494 (IV.xx.8).

27 Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 340–341. In his commentary on Micah 5:5, Calvin notes: "The best condition of the people is when they can choose, by common consent, their own shepherds: for when any by force usurps the supreme power, it is tyranny; and when men become kings by hereditary right, it seems not consistent with liberty." Calvin, *Old Testament and New Testament Commentaries*, Calvin Translation Society (Reprint; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Baker Books, 1989), 28:309–310. Hereafter cited as CTS.

28 Lectures on Daniel 6 (1561), in *CO* 41:3, 7. Cited in McNeill, *The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought*, 159.

ernment is practiced, magistrates are accountable to God and limited by him for the benefit of the governed. As Calvin notes:

Magistrates ... are not to rule for their own interest but for the public good. Nor are they endowed with unbridled power, but what is restricted to the wellbeing of their subjects. In short, they are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their power. For as they are deputed by God and do his business, they must give an account to him.<sup>29</sup>

Because magistrates have been appointed by God, their subjects have a divine calling to obey them. Calvin takes at face value the commands to civil obedience found in biblical texts such as Romans 13:1–2, Titus 3:1 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. In his comments on Romans 13, Calvin calls private individuals who oppose their princes “public enemies of the human race,” since rulers “have not ascended by their own power into this high station, but have been placed there by the Lord’s hand.”<sup>30</sup> Likewise, in his commentary on 1 Peter 2, Calvin observes: “[O]bedience is due to all who rule, because they have been raised to that honor not by chance, but by God’s providence.”<sup>31</sup> Even in cases where magistrates are wicked and unjust, Calvin believes, the vocation of private citizens requires that they obey their rulers and offer fervent prayers on their behalf:

Not only should we behave obediently toward those leaders who perform their office uprightly and faithfully as they ought, but also it is fitting to endure those who insolently abuse their power, until freed from their yoke by a lawful order. For as a good prince is a proof of divine beneficence for the preservation of human welfare, so a bad and wicked ruler is [God’s] whip to chastise the people’s transgressions.<sup>32</sup>

Calvin’s fundamental conservatism is here on full display: corrupt governments are better than anarchy; people who seek to overthrow the political order are rebelling against God’s providential design and will. It is the vocation of magistrates to rule, of subjects to obey.

## Part II: Calvin and Political Resistance

Certainly the gravitational pull of Calvin’s political thought is towards complete obedience to magisterial rule. However, in the final paragraphs of the *Institutes*, and in passages scattered throughout his commentaries and published sermons, Calvin articulates three important exceptions to this general rule, where resisting

29 Calvin, Commentary on Romans 13:4 [1540], CTS 38:481; CO 49:250. See Tuininga, *Calvin’s Political Theology*, 244–245.

30 Calvin, Commentary on Romans 13:1, 3, in CTS 38:478,480.

31 Calvin, Commentary on 1 Peter 2:13, in CTS 44.2, 81.

32 Calvin, Catechism (1538) in I. John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism. A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 38.

superior magistrates is legitimate. First, passive resistance is required of private individuals when a wicked prince encroaches upon the spiritual kingdom by commanding them to participate in superstition or idolatry.<sup>33</sup> In such cases, private individuals must never wield the sword; rather, they are obligated to resist their prince through passive disobedience, flight, or even martyrdom. Calvin finds biblical justification for passive resistance in a variety of biblical accounts, including the Hebrew midwives in Egypt who defied Pharaoh's command to kill newborn Jewish boys (Exodus 1), as well as in the apostles' bold words before the Sanhedrin: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:9).<sup>34</sup> Under no circumstances should Christians obey wicked rulers who command them to disobey or ignore God's laws. It would be better "to die a hundred times than to deviate from true service to God," Calvin insists.<sup>35</sup>

Second, Calvin argues that God sometimes appoints "open avengers" or "liberators" (*manifestos vindices*) to punish or overthrow wicked rulers and deliver his people. These "open avengers" are individuals or even kingdoms whom God "arms from heaven" to execute his particular judgment, as seen in the case of Moses, who broke the tyranny of Pharaoh; or, the judge Othniel, who overpowered Chusan, the King of Syria (Judges 3:9–10); or King Darius, who crushed the power of the Babylonians.<sup>36</sup> While Calvin establishes this particular form of active resistance on biblical precedent, he is vague—probably intentionally so—as to whether God continues to appoint "avengers" to execute judgment in the present day. The reformer's aversion to anarchy, and the dark legacy of self-styled prophets and revolutionaries like Thomas Müntzer, made this form of resistance potentially explosive and largely unserviceable for preserving public order.

The third category of political resistance that Calvin permits is the active resistance of subordinate magistrates against their superiors who have become tyrants by breaking God's commandments or violating public law. The reformer articulates this important principle in the penultimate paragraph of the first edition of the *Institutes*, and it appears unchanged in all editions thereafter. Calvin indicates that the constitutions of many nations contain provisions for popular magistrates (*populares magistratus*) to guard the freedoms of the people

33 Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 347.

34 *Institutes* (1559), 1521 (IV.xx.32).

35 Calvin, Sermon on Genesis 16:5–9, March 23, 1560, cited in Max Engammare, "Calvin monarchomaque? Du soupçon à l'argument," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 89 (1998): 210. See also Calvin's comments on Acts 5:29: "Therefore, we must obey rulers so far, that the commandment of God be not broken. ... But so soon as rulers do lead us away from the obedience of God, because they strive against God with sacrilegious boldness, their pride must be abated, that God may be above all in authority" (CTS 36:214–215).

36 *Institutes* (1536), 224–225 (6:55); *Institutes* (1559), 1517 (IV.xx.30).

and curb manifest tyranny. This was true of the ancient regimes of Sparta, Athens, and Rome—with their ephors, demarchs, and tribunes; it may also be true of modern France, where the Estates General has been constituted to restrain royal power. Calvin believes that these public officers have not only the right, but the divine calling and duty to intervene when superior magistrates take away the people's freedom and "fall upon and assault the lowly common folk." Calvin here decisively rejects all forms of popular rebellion—although, presumably, he permits the people to support popular magistrates as they oppose tyrants. Nonetheless, active resistance must be initiated by lesser magistrates alone who "have been appointed protectors" of the public welfare "by God's ordinance."<sup>37</sup>

What exactly does Calvin mean by the term *populares magistratus*? Quentin Skinner contends that these are public officers who are not only ordained by God, but elected by the people to represent them and protect their interests. This is proven, he believes, by the fact that Calvin uses the adjective *populares* rather than *inferiores*; that these officers are responsible to guard the liberties of the people; and that the historical examples given (ephors, demarchs, tribunes) were all officers elected annually by popular vote.<sup>38</sup> For Skinner, then, Calvin is introducing a distinctively "secular and constitutionalist element" into his political discourse.<sup>39</sup> Skinner's proposal is intriguing but ultimately not convincing. Marc-Edouard Chenevière and other scholars have proposed a more cautious (and, in my view, more accurate) reading of this important passage.<sup>40</sup> They argue that when Calvin uses the term *populares magistratus* he is not referring exclusively to popular representatives, but to subordinate magistrates in general entrusted with protecting the welfare of the people. Calvin does not state that these officers are elected by the people, represent the people, or are ultimately responsible to the people. Instead, the reformer acknowledges the fact that in many nations constitutional officers exist that are entrusted to protect the liberties of the people—and God has ordained and appointed these lesser magistrates to oppose wicked princes in keeping with their vocation and constitutional role. Their authority is derived from God, not the people. In other words, Calvin is not constructing a secular argument for magisterial authority; rather, he is affirming the value of positive law by which God executes his judgment through human agents and

37 *Institutes* (1536), 225 (6.55); *Institutes* (1559), 1519 (IV.xx.31).

38 Skinner, *Foundation of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 232–233.

39 Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 233.

40 Marc-Edouard Chenevière, *La Pensée Politique de Calvin* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 332–349. See also Ralph Keen, "The Limits of Power and Obedience in the Later Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27.2 (1992): 252–276; H. A. Lloyd, "Calvin and the Duty of Guardians to Resist," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32.1 (1981): 65–67; Michael Gilstrap, "John Calvin's Theology of Resistance," in Gary North, ed., *The Theology of Christian Resistance* (n.p.: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), 180–217; Graham Maddox, *Religion and the Rise of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 121–143.

institutions against tyrants who crush the people and deprive them of their freedom.

Calvin's theory of the resistance of popular magistrates (such as ephors, tribunes, or the estates) was in no way original with him. Historians such Chenevière, Skinner, and McNeill have demonstrated that the concept existed among Catholic lawyers during the conciliarist crisis of the fifteenth century, as well as in the writings of Huldrych Zwingli, Philipp Melanchthon, and Martin Bucer.<sup>41</sup> What has been overlooked is that Calvin himself first broaches the idea of ephoral authority in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (1532). In a paragraph devoted to tyrants and the brevity of their reigns, Calvin quotes a statement of Theopompus, King of the Spartans in favor of limited monarchy, and then notes: "For it was during his reign that the ephors had been instituted, to prevent royal whim from going to excess."<sup>42</sup> Calvin then cites a passage from Cicero's *On Duties* defending the role of lesser magistrates to restrain absolute monarchy.<sup>43</sup> What this suggests, then, is that at the time that Calvin wrote the first edition of his *Institutes*, he was aware of classical treatments regarding lesser magistrates, and may have had at his disposal contemporary resistance theories written by Protestant humanists in Germany and Switzerland.

Scholars have questioned whether Calvin's resistance theories became more extreme in the final years of his life as religious violence escalated in France. In their studies of Calvin's later commentaries and sermons, Willem Nijenhuis and Max Engammare have shown convincingly that the reformer employed increasingly inflammatory and hostile language against wicked monarchs in general, and the French kings in particular. In one sermon, the reformer goes so far as to state that political rulers who defy God and reject his sovereignty deserve to have people spit in their faces.<sup>44</sup> Such harsh pulpit rhetoric, however, does not support the claim of several scholars (including Nijenhuis) that Calvin finally granted the right of active resistance to private individuals.<sup>45</sup> Rather, Calvin's

41 See, Chenevière, *La Pensée Politique de Calvin*, 332–333; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 231–232; McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," 164–165.

42 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, ed. and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 201. I am aware of no scholar who has recognized the significance of this passage.

43 Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classic Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 2.23.80. A stronger statement is found in Cicero, *De Legibus*, 3.7.1–17.

44 See Max Engammare, "Calvin monarchomaque?" 222.

45 W. Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata. Studies on the Reformation*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 92; David Whitford agrees with this assessment in his "Robbing Paul to Pay Peter: The Reception of Paul in Sixteenth-Century Political Theology," in Ward Holder, ed., *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 601–602. Nijenhuis bases his claim that Calvin ultimately affirmed the right of active resistance to private individuals on a passage from Calvin's sermon on 2 Samuel 8:9–18, which he delivered on July 31, 1562. See Calvin, *Predigten*

theory of resistance remains consistent over the course of his career, even as his language against political tyrants becomes ever more abusive. For Calvin, only “open avengers” and lesser magistrates have authority from God to resist actively superior magistrates who commit tyranny.

The basic outline of Calvin’s doctrine of political resistance, then, can be summarized as follows: 1.) Though God’s Word nowhere prescribes a single form of government, the polity best suited for human flourishing is one in which sovereign authority is shared by multiple rulers, is well-ordered and limited in its scope, and receives the consent of the people.<sup>46</sup> 2.) The roles and responsibilities of magistrates and private individuals are defined and circumscribed by their respective God-given vocations. 3.) Private individuals must obey their rulers. However, should a tyrant command private individuals to disobey or ignore God’s law, the people must “obey God rather than man” and exercise passive resistance against the wicked ruler. 4.) In biblical history, God sometimes raised up “open avengers” such as Moses or Othniel to oppose wicked kings or nations. (Calvin is not clear as to whether God continues to appoint such liberators in his own day.) 5.) Inferior or subordinate magistrates who possess a constitutional mandate may initiate active resistance against tyrants to protect the liberties of the people. In such cases, however, the basis for magisterial action appears to rest, not in popular consent or the people’s subjective rights, but on divine authority.

Before we turn our attention to Huguenot resistance literature after Calvin, it is important to highlight one curious fact. John Calvin’s defense of active resistance by popular magistrates in the *Institutes* is based entirely on an argument from positive law or political history; he offers no *biblical* warrant for this doctrine. Indeed, I am not aware of *any* place in the reformer’s extant literary corpus where he provides explicit *scriptural* support for the right of subordinate magistrates to oppose tyrants—although traces of this doctrine are found in at least two of his later sermons.<sup>47</sup> This is all the more surprising given that Calvin *does* provide such exegetical support when he grants to private individuals and “open avengers” their respective rights of resistance. This omission creates a real tension in Calvin’s political theory. The apostolic requirement of civil obedience

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*über das 2. Buch Samuelis*, vol. 1, ed. Hanns Rückert (Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1961), 244. Engammare, Hesselink and others have shown conclusively that Nijenhuis misinterpreted this passage. See Engammare, “Calvin monarchomaeque,” 217; I. John Hesselink, “Calvin on the Nature and Limits of Political Resistance,” in *Christian Faith and Violence*, vol. 2, eds. Kirk Van Keulen and Martien Brinkman (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 69–70.

46 See Paul Wells, “Reformational Thought and the Social Covenant,” *Themelios* 31.3 (2006): 32–40.

47 Chenevière has located two passages in Calvin’s sermons on 1 Samuel where the reformer makes reference to the right of lesser magistrates to resist a tyrant. See Chenevière, *La Pensée Politique de Calvin*, 334–335; citing CO 29:552 and 30.496.

stated in passages like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 would seem to disqualify any argument drawn from constitutional history or positive law for Protestants who affirm the supreme authority of Scripture. Calvin's exegesis and his doctrine of lesser magistrates appear to point in very different directions.<sup>48</sup> The terrifying massacres of St. Bartholomew's Day in August 1572 will serve to mobilize a group of reformed polemicists, including François Hotman, Theodore Beza, and Philippe du Plessis Mornay, who will attempt to correct this weakness in Calvin's argument, even as they take his political theory in a decidedly more radical direction.

### Part III: The Monarchomachs and the Warrant for Political Resistance

The assassination of Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny in Paris on the morning of August 24, 1572, triggered a paroxysm of violence that quickly spread to other French provincial cities, including Tours, Lyon, Rouen, and Orléans, as frenzied Catholic crowds looted Huguenot homes and hunted down and murdered their neighbors suspected of Protestant heresy. In all, perhaps 10,000 Huguenots were killed over the next several months. After initially blaming the murder of Coligny on a vendetta of the Guise family, King Charles IX and his mother Catherine de Medici admitted that they had ordered the extermination of Protestant nobles in Paris as a preemptive strike to crush a Protestant conspiracy against the royal family.<sup>49</sup> In the desperate years that followed, French reformed leaders circulated dozens of pamphlets and books in an effort to correct this misinformation, marshal political and military support from foreign allies, and justify armed resistance against the Valois kings whom they deemed to be the cruelest of tyrants. The substance and historical context of this explosive resistance literature has been studied in detail by Julian Franklin, Quentin Skinner, Robert Kingdon, John Witte, Denis Crouzet, and others.<sup>50</sup> My intention, here, is

48 I have found Andrew Fulford's essay "Participating in Political Providence: The Theological Foundations of Resistance in Calvin," a helpful resource in conceptualizing this problem in Calvin's political thought. In *For the Healing of the Nations: Essays on Creation, Redemption, and Neo-Calvinism*, eds. Peter Escalante and Bradford Littlejohn (Lexington, Ky.: Davenant Trust, 2014), 105–137.

49 See Scott Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 57; Robert M. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

50 See Julian Franklin, ed., *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Western Publishing Company, 1969); Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political*



to focus on three of the most important of these political works—pamphlets written by François Hotman, Theodore Beza, and Philippe du Plessis Mornay—paying particular attention to the biblical warrant that each author provides for active resistance by lesser magistrates.

### 1. François Hotman and the *Francogallia*

Trained as a humanist and legal scholar, François Hotman (1524–1590) was one of a number of French intellectuals and reformed leaders who sought refuge in Geneva to escape the bloodshed of Saint Bartholomew’s Day.<sup>51</sup> Hotman’s *Francogallia*, published the following year, was an expansive constitutional history of France which argued that in the earliest centuries of the kingdom, the French kings were neither hereditary nor absolute in authority, but had been subject to the consent and will of the people expressed through representative assemblies of the kingdom.<sup>52</sup> According to Hotman, these popular councils, which over time evolved into the Estates General, were the primary custodians of the fundamental laws of the kingdom. It was their prerogative to elect and depose monarchs; they shared with the crown the responsibility to decide matters of peace and war, establish public law, approve taxes, and preserve the people’s liberties.<sup>53</sup> French constitutional history demonstrated that the people’s sovereignty was “a holy and sacred liberty,” indeed, a basic human right (“*une partie du droits des gens*”).<sup>54</sup> The French kings, for their part, were expected to serve as governors, guardians and tutors of the people, and were responsible to work alongside the estates to enforce public laws and provide for the common good.<sup>55</sup> Should the king become a tyrant who trampled on the liberties of the people and violated the public trust, the estates were authorized to depose him forcibly from office—

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*Thought; Kingdon, Myths about the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacres; Kingdon, “Calvinism and resistance theory”; Denis Crouzet, Les Guerriers de Dieu. La violence au temps des troubles de Religion-vers 1525-vers 1610, 2 vols. (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1990). See also Ralph Giesey, “The Monarchomach Triumvir”; Paul Moussiegt, Hotman et Du Plessis-Mornay, Théories politiques des réformés au XVIe siècle (Geneva: Slatking Reprints, 1970); Manetsch, Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France.*

51 For biographical information on Hotman, see Donald Kelley, *François Hotman, A Revolutionary’s Ordeal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

52 François Hotman, *La France-Gaule ou Gaule-françoise de F. Hotoman Iurisconsulte*, in Simon Goulart, *Memoires de l’Estat de France, Sous Charles Neufiesme*, t. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (n.p.: n.p., 1578), 383r–384r.

53 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 433v.

54 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 407v, 427v.

55 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 399v.

which (Hotman claimed) had happened on several occasions in French history.<sup>56</sup> The king was created for the people, not the people for the king.<sup>57</sup>

Hotman argued, however, that over the previous century the authority and prerogative of the Estates General had been significantly diminished due to the machinations of royal lawyers, the noxious influence of Catholic clergy (who had commandeered one of the estates), and the growth of regional *parlements* that had usurped the distinctive role of popular assemblies.<sup>58</sup> The weakening of the Estates had, in turn, resulted in political tyranny and social turmoil, seen most clearly in the civil wars that had afflicted France during the previous decade. The solution to France's woes, Hotman suggested, was to recover her ancient public laws and restore the authority of the Estates General, which alone could protect the sovereign rights of the people.<sup>59</sup> In every age, this fundamental principle remained inviolable: "The welfare of the people must be the highest law."<sup>60</sup>

Hotman's *Francogallia* was a dispassionate political discourse, with no explicit call to action and few references to the contemporary political crisis. This has led some scholars to conclude that the work was written before Saint Bartholomew's Day, and published only after the massacres.<sup>61</sup> Whatever the case, the implications of Hotman's constitutional argument were clear enough: A popular council of the estates had legitimate constitutional authority to check tyranny and restore peace and justice to the kingdom. If Charles IX refused to defend the rights and liberties of his people, then popular assemblies could legitimately resist him.

For our purposes, it is important to note that the *Francogallia* provides no biblical justification for the right of popular assemblies like the Estates General to resist actively or depose a legitimately elected king. Instead, as with Calvin, his argument is based exclusively on the constitutional structure and history of the French kingdom. Hotman goes beyond Calvin, however, in stipulating that the Estates were not only elected by the people, but representatives of the people and responsible to them. Moreover, Hotman's robust defense of the sovereignty of the people expressed through popular assemblies finds no parallel in Calvin's political thought.

56 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 427r, 428r, 408r-v. Hotman reports, for example, that a popular assembly not only elected Childeric, the first king of 'Franco-Gallia,' but also later deposed him for immorality and expelled him from the kingdom (ibid., 408r-v).

57 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 454v.

58 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 466v, 474r-482r.

59 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 378r-v.

60 Hotman, *La France-Gaule*, 437r, 466v.

61 Ralph Giesey, "When and Why Hotman Wrote the *Francogallia*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanism et Renaissance* 29 (1967): 581-611.