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Corporal Imagery and the Language of Exclusion in Catholic Propaganda during the Reign of Charles IX (1560-1574)

Abstract: The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) saw a deep polarization of the French society, fractured along confessional lines. The religious unity of the kingdom whose motto was “un roi, une loi, une foi” was shattered like never before and this represented a massive trauma for the sixteenth-century people, who had been accustomed from times immemorial to see religious unity as the greatest good and division as the greatest evil. Despite their differences in many other matters, this was an issue which both Catholics and Huguenots could agree upon, thus both proclaimed their wish to restore this unity, Huguenots by means of a national council, Catholics by bringing back the Protestants into the Catholic fold or by excluding them from the “body politic” of the realm. With respect to the latter, radical Catholics carried out an intense propaganda war intent to demonize the Huguenots and depict them as a malignant element, who had willingly placed themselves outside the “body” of the Church and, therefore, had to be cast out of the “body” of the realm as well. One of the tools employed in this onslaught of anti-Huguenot propaganda was the corporal analogy, in particular the vivid and powerful image of the heresy as an infectious disease, which appeared in the discourse of the most influential Catholic propagandists, such as Simon Vigor, René Benoist, Antoine de Mouchy, Gentien Hervet and other less known (or anonymous) authors of pamphlets. This paper tries to explain the significance of this argument in the overall picture of the anti-Huguenot rhetoric and in the creation/preservation of a boundary between the two faiths, while analyzing the occurrences of this analogy in the political and propaganda literature of the era..

Keywords: Huguenots, Wars of Religion, body politic, heresy, disease

1. The Spread of the Reformation Ideas in France during the Reign of Francis I and the First Uses of Corporal Analogies to Attack the New Doctrines

When the Lutheran heresy had started to spread throughout Europe during the 1520s, the French monarchy was rather slow to react and, even when it did, it did not put much energy into pursuing the matter: in fact, during the first years of the French Reformation, the Parlement of Paris showed a greater desire to prosecute religious heterodoxy, often against the very wishes of the king – such as during the infamous case of Louis Berquin, a French lawyer who ended up on the stake for heresy in 1529, despite Francis I's attempts to save his life. The fact that the Parlement took this role upon itself is not surprising, when one considers that medieval French law defined heresy as a matter of importance to the civil authorities, who accepted responsibility for punishing convicted heretics (Baumgartner 1995, 180), and that the Parlement viewed itself not only as the highest court of justice of the realm, but also as the instrument for correcting the mistakes of the king: if the monarchy did not properly fulfil its task of destroying heresy, then the Parlement considered to be its duty to act in its stead. The fact that the king's sister, Marguerite de Navarre, was associated with characters whose orthodoxy was suspect¹, played a part in this, because such prosecutions could have touched the king's honour – and Francis I, who saw many of the people suspected of heresy by the Parlement as harmless humanists merely renewing the traditional calls for Church reform, ignored at first the Lutheran threat. Influential members of the Parlement, such as Pierre Lizet, laid on this occasion the ideological foundations of the Parlement's self-assumed role in the pursuit of heresy: Lizet argued that, even when executing a heretic convicted by an ecclesiastical court, a royal judge did not simply obey the ecclesiastical judge, "which would be pure subservience", but performed "his own duty", because kings had the duty "to correct novel doctrines, schisms, and sects against the Church's unity", and claimed jurisdiction over lay heretics for the Parlement (Lange 2014, 174-175). The latter had an excellent opportunity to take action on this matter and impose its will on the monarchy in the aftermath of the battle of Pavia, which saw Francis I defeated and taken as captive to Spain: the Parlement had accrued many grievances during the previous years, such as over the Concordat of

¹ For an extensive analysis of Marguerite of Navarre's involvement in the religious controversies of the time, see Reid 2009.

Bologna from 1516², but the spread of heresy provided the easiest target and President Briçonnet declared in Parlement that “the calamities suffered in this Realm are due to the heresies and blasphemies spreading throughout the Realm” (Reid 2009, 318).

During this period, the anti-Protestant rhetoric was already starting to make use of corporal analogies in order to illustrate the danger of heresy and the need for a vigorous repression of the new heterodox beliefs³: in 1526, in a letter to Louise de Savoy, the Parlement of Paris referred to the Lutherans as “a pestiferous and contagious seed” (Lange 2014, 191). The Parlement’s stubborn prosecution of Louis Berquin, despite the king’s repeated attempts to stop it, was extremely meaningful for the future course of events, because it implied, through the actions of the most important legal institution of the realm, what the preachers during the reigns of Charles IX and Henry III were going to state openly and explicitly: that the king had no freedom of action as far as religion and heresy were concerned and any measure taken in the heretics’ favour was null and void. However, even during this period, the king was not as uninvolved as some of his critics seemed to believe and was already taking measures to safeguard Catholicism and check the spread of the Luther-inspired doctrines, albeit without accompanying such measures with an active policy of persecution. These actions involved several provincial synods, which were held in 1528, and even a national synod presided by Chancellor Antoine Duprat, where, invoking the metaphor of the heresy as a plague, the participants produced a number of articles of faith, 16, affirming as truth of the faith the doctrines of the Eucharist, purgatory, the seven sacraments, the necessity of both faith

² The Parlement of Paris even refused to register the Concordat, initially, because it considered that it infringed upon the Gallican liberties and allowed for excessive papal interference in French ecclesiastical matters (Parsons 2004, 33-36) and did so only after a year of tergiversations and haggling, at the king’s express command. The main change the Concordat brought with regard to French religious policy was that it replaced the elections for ecclesiastical offices, a procedure set up by the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges in 1438, with royal appointments. The popes, in turn, wanted the Pragmatic Sanction gone because they regarded it as a product of fifteenth-century conciliarism and they had been pressuring the French kings for its abolition ever since. The Sorbonne and a part of the clergy were also hostile to the Concordat and Francis I had to resort to threats in order to suppress the opposition (Knecht 1996, 90-103)

³ There was nothing particularly new about such usage, which enjoyed a long and well-established tradition, with heresy being often compared with different diseases afflicting the human body, in particular with a plague, and the heretic with a spiritual leper. For instance, there are frequent such references during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with respect to the heresies emerging at that time in Western Europe, like Catharism (Sălăvăstru 2022, 263-279).

and good works for salvation, the necessity of clerical celibacy, the validity of the cult of the saints and of monastic vows, the infallibility of the Church, and the authority of councils (Garrison 1995, 201).

The more and more numerous occurrences of Protestant iconoclasm, combined with the attacks against the doctrines of the Roman Church, forced the monarchy to slowly reconsider its position, with the infamous Affair of the Placards from 17-18 October 1534⁴ being the event that pushed Francis I past the brink. Afterwards, there was an intensification of the religious persecution, although not without many vacillations from the royal government. The king himself made use of metaphorical language to justify the change in policy: the Reformation's criticism of the Mass was the issue which touched him and the Crown of France most deeply and it led him to determine that "when the body politic was threatened by the infection of one or several of its members, the only cure was amputation – the forceful and merciless extirpation of heresy" (Elwood 1999, 138). For Francis I, heresy "was a poison which could have killed the body of his kingdom: if his own arm was infected, he would not hesitate to cut it, if his own children were afflicted, he would burn it" – this was, according to Denis Crouzet, the role of a sacrificial king, which Francis I was prepared to embrace (Crouzet 2008, 248) and it anticipated the repression, brief, but harsh, which was to follow in 1535. On 29 January 1535, eight days after an expiatory procession in which the king himself and his sons took part, in order to beg forgiveness for the attacks against the Blessed Sacrament, a royal edict announced "the king's intention to exterminate 'the Lutheran sect and the other heresies which, to our bitter regret and displeasure, have broken out and fester within our realm'" (Garrison 1995, 204).

2. Heresy as Sedition in the Catholic Discourse on the Eve of the French Wars of Religion

A significant issue in this anti-Protestant campaign waged by the monarchy in the late reign of Francis I and during the reign of Henry II

⁴ During that night, placards with a text attacking the Catholic Mass were posted in several major French cities and even in the royal castle of Amboise, where the king was in residence. Ann Ramsey explains the shock value of these placards due to the fact that the text "challenged the efficacy of an entire ritual system by denying Christ's real presence in the Eucharist and by damning the idea of the Mass as a reiterative sacrifice" (Ramsey 1999, 25-26). The event most certainly shook Francis I into action, as the king interpreted it as a challenge to his own authority and to the sacral nature of the French monarchy, and it will be later regarded by many Protestant figures as a significant mistake.

was the constant association between heresy and sedition, a trend with deep medieval roots, which would provide the later anti-Huguenot propagandists with ready-made material to argue that the Huguenots were a part of the body politic inherently rebellious and who, therefore, could not be trusted. A 1540 edict charged that profession of false doctrine “contains in itself the crimes of human and divine lèse-majesté, popular sedition and the disturbance of our state and the public peace” (Roelker 1996, 208). The language used by the Edict of Chateaubriand from June 1551 was just as revealing: its biggest concern were the illicit assemblies of the heretics and, therefore, the royal magistrates were tasked to seek out those of the “Lutheran heresy” and “to punish them as fomenters of sedition, schismatics, disturbers of public harmony and tranquility, rebels, and disobedient evaders of our ordinances and commandments” (Holt 2005, 29). Even after the death of Henry II in 1559, when the weakness of the new regime forced the new rulers to gradually tone down the previous persecution, this association persisted: when the Edict of Romorantin from 1560 transferred the prosecution of heresy cases from the royal courts to the ecclesiastical tribunals, the punishment of “illicit assemblies and forceful demonstrations” was entrusted to royal tribunals called *Présidiaux*: the edict was seemingly less harsh than the ones issued under the previous kings, because it focused more on law and order rather than religion and “it implied liberty of conscience and an end to religious persecution by the state”, but, in practice, religious dissent and sedition could not be so easily distinguished (Knecht 2010, 26-27). Even for those less prone to Catholic radicalism, submission to the king’s authority automatically had to imply religious orthodoxy as well, because, in the words of Mack Holt, “the symbolism and the ritual of the coronation served to imbricate the monarchy and the Catholic Church together, making any form of heresy a threat to royal authority” and “Protestantism brought with it the perceived danger of dissolving the nation itself as well as the secular and religious authority on which that sense of nation was based” (Holt 2002, 23-24). That was something that the anti-Huguenot rhetoric of the Catholic radicals – which was starting to take proportions in the absence of a strong central authority taking the lead to crush heresy – readily made use of. In the words of Alain Tallon, “rebel against God and against the king, the Huguenot becomes a stranger in his own country, because he denies the faith of his ancestors and breaks the chain of continuity which links the Frenchmen to their glorious and holy past” (Tallon 2002, 57). As far as the Catholics were concerned, what occurred

was an auto-exclusion of the heretic from the French community and, for the radicals, that was sufficient to justify his extermination.

The death of Henry II on 10 July 1559, from the injuries he had suffered in a tourney accident twelve days before, had momentous implications, because it severely weakened the central authority at a time when the internal political crisis was turning more and more acute. Henry II had vowed to eradicate heresy in his kingdom and, in order to focus on this goal, had made peace with Spain, but even him would, likely, have been taken aback and placed in difficulty by the support which the new faith was gaining amongst his nobility. His death ushered in a new king, Francis II, too young to assert his authority and dominated by his Guise in-laws, to the great discontent of the other noble clans: this new government was just as willing as the previous one to persecute heresy and enforce Catholic orthodoxy, but was too weak to carry out a forceful campaign in this regard, especially since it was impossible for the Guises to gather around them the entire French Catholic nobility, as Henry II could have done. In this context, the opposition on religious grounds was given additional strength by the traditional suspicions against a noble family (the Guises) who became too powerful and monopolized royal favours: the Huguenots could thus claim that they were acting *for* the king, to protect him against grasping subjects threatening to usurp the royal authority. That was the motivation of the so-called “tumult of Amboise”, when a group of Protestants planned to kidnap the king in order to remove him from under the influence of his Guise relatives. Having failed, the conspiracy was followed by a harsh repression, the responsibility for which the Huguenots attributed again to the Guise clan, and especially to the Cardinal of Lorraine, the most influential French churchman at that time. As far as Catholics were concerned, especially those favouring harsh measures against the Protestants, the episode of the conspiracy provided them with vindication: in their opinion, the masks had fallen off and the Huguenots’ previous protestations of loyalty to the Crown were proven to be false. The distinction which the Huguenots were trying to draw between their attacks on the Catholic Church and the respect for social order they claimed to profess was impossible to accept for a great number of French Catholics. Claude Haton, a priest from Provins connected with the Guises and one of the most fervent anti-Huguenot propagandists of the time, claimed in his *Memoirs* that “all the heretics and Lutherans in the kingdom” were involved in a plot to kill the king because they believed him to be a tyrant and a persecutor of true Christians, and he blamed them for an attempt that was made on Henry

II's life in 1558 as he left mass at the Sainte-Chapelle (Diefendorf 1991, 53-54). In 1560, in the aftermath of the Amboise attempt, Jean de la Vacquerie, a doctor at Sorbonne, claimed that the most Christian king of France, in his "zeal to guard the honour of God", would not allow the Catholic Church to be oppressed, arguing at the same time that the heretics had always been "the mortal enemies of kings and lords", inciting rebellion with their false doctrines (Holt 2005, 44-45).

3. The Rhetoric of the "Contagious" Heretics and of the Need for their Removal from the "Body Politic"

The hopes of the radical Catholics for a campaign of repression against heresy were to be disappointed because the death of Francis II in December 1560 led to the expulsion of the Guise clan from power and the new government led by Catherine de Medici, as regent for her young son Charles IX, moved in a completely different direction. Instead of the persecution dreamt of by the radical Catholics, they were to witness notable Huguenots invited at Court, talks of finding a common ground between Catholicism and the Protestants and edicts of pacification which amounted, in practice, to the official recognition of a second religion in France. For the radical Catholics, these were extremely concerning developments and, even though Catholics represented the majority of the population in France, their fears were not entirely unfounded, because the undeclared purpose of many Huguenots was the conversion of the kingdom to the Reformation. Much has been said about the Catholic purpose to re-establish religious unity, but the Huguenots pursued the same goal, with them as the victors, and this meant first and foremost the conversion "of the monarchy to their credo and the eradication, peaceful or violent, of the competitor" (Tallon 2002, 109).

These concerns which grasped the Catholics at the beginning of the reign of Charles IX led to a massive propaganda effort, especially from Catholic preachers, in order to whip up the Catholic devotion of the population and convince the monarchy to change its course. Even though Francis I and Henry II had not been successful in their efforts, they, at least, made serious attempts to eradicate heresy: in the words of Denis Crouzet, "the perfect royalty was followed by what one could name imperfect royalty, at least in the eyes of the ultra-Catholics weighted by an eschatological fear which saw in the Huguenots the precursors of Antichrist" (Crouzet 2008, 250). Equally painful for the Catholics, and not just for the radicals, was the end of the myth that there had been no

heresy in France: that was historically not true, but, still, the idea developed concomitently with the progress of the Gallican sentiment during the previous two centuries (Sălăvăstru 2022, 276). When confronting the pretensions of the papacy, it was a matter of pride for the Gallicans to point out the alleged doctrinal purity of the French Church, which, in their opinion, granted it special privileges, in particular the right to be quasi-autonomous from papal interference. For this purpose, heretical movements like the Albigensians were conveniently forgotten. This myth was quickly exploded by the Reformation and its end led to efforts to push the king into a new role, that of a purifier of his kingdom, following the ancient model of the crusading kings of the thirteenth century, and in particular, that of Louis IX, the saintly king of the Capetian dynasty.

The language employed by the Catholic preachers during this period was full of explicit corporal analogies, where the protestants were compared with an infectious disease afflicting the body of the Church and the realm. In this, they were following a long medieval tradition, but the nature of the doctrinal disagreements with the Protestants made such resort to corporal analogies even more appealing: one of the biggest disagreements between Huguenots and Catholics was the Catholic Mass and the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. Thus, it was easy for Catholic propagandists to argue that, by their refusal to participate in the communal religious life, such as the Corpus Christi processions, or to partake of the host during Mass, the Huguenots set themselves apart from the body of the realm. In the words of Barbara Diefendorf, "the Catholic preachers built their defence on the powerful idea of the Church united in the body of Christ", where "the Church was conceived as an organic unity with each part necessary to the whole" (Diefendorf 1991, 150). According to Luc Racaut, "Catholic polemic published in the 1560s described Protestantism as a source of divisiveness and chaos, breaking up the body social and the body politic into as many parts as a body has limbs". A treatise of the Polish cardinal Stanislas Hosius, *Traicte des sects et heresies de notre temps*, followed the anthropomorphic symbolism expressed in Corpus Christi when describing Luther as "tearing apart the body of Christ". This analogy was also used by René Benoist in a tract defending transubstantiation against the Reformers (Racaut 2002, 83). Benoist was one of the most fervent users of such analogies, but, obviously, he was far from the only one: Pierre Dyvolé, in a sermon dedicated to defending the Catholic Mass, invoked the idea of heresy as a deadly disease and used it to establish a clear distinction between the

typical sinners, who can be saved through the usual methods of the Church, and the heretics who cannot: "There are ill people, those in a state of sin, who can be healed by physicians and the cures of the Church, which are the priest and the holy sacraments" (Dyvolé 1577, 467). On the other hand, heresy is incurable and those afflicted by it are "dead and rotten": it is a fate they have chosen for themselves, because it is by their own decision that they have become "cut off and separated from the Church, as members rotten and dead". For the faithful Catholics, removing the heretics is not just a spiritual duty, but an act of self-preservation: "just like a rotten or dead member is greatly damaging and harmful to the human body, if it is not separated forthwith: so are the heretics, very dangerous and damaging to the Church, if they are not immediately expelled and banished out of it" (Dyvolé 1577, 467). However, since the heretics have already exited the Church themselves, the conclusion many devoted Catholics would draw from such arguments is that the Huguenots must also be, physically, eliminated from the body politic: since, at that time, most Catholics did not wish to differentiate between the Catholic Church and the political community (an idea which would start to gain more ground only after mid 1570s and impose itself during the final stages of the Wars of Religion, finding its final expression in the Edict of Nantes from 1598), that was an easy assumption to make.

What increased the unease of the Catholics was the fact that, in the case of the Huguenots, the typical social boundaries did not longer work: the new religion gained adherents amongst all strata of the society, from the royal family to the lowest bourgeoisie (Sălăvăștru 2022, 272). Gentien Hervet illustrated perfectly such worries when pointing out that "the Protestants were able to mix freely among the Catholic population and spread their heresies as they would the plague" (Racaut 2002, 57) and, for this reason, he argued that Protestants should be segregated like Jews to avoid contagion (Racaut 2002, 85). A similar point was expressed by Stanislas Hosius, in his *Traicte des sects et heresies de notre temps*, where he referred to heresy as a "spiritual leprosy" and argued that, just as lepers were separated from healthy people in order to avoid contagion, the same thing should be done with the heretics: "We cut the putrid member, so that it will not harm the others: we separate the lepers from the company of others so that the foul leprosy won't infect the healthy. How much should we separate those infected and corrupted by the spiritual leprosy, so that it won't infect and ruin the sheep of Jesus Christ?" (Hosius 1561, 21-22). The same Hosius emphasized the

necessity of a physical separation between good Catholics and heretics with the same analogy of leprosy, accompanied by the threat of divine retribution: “No good Christian must have with them any familiarity, nor any conversation, or friendship. And to those who will do otherwise, mainly if he has no previous connection with them, I will denounce him as infected with their leprosy & and consequently to the anger of the divine vengeance” (Hosius 1561, 53).

Hosius was not directly involved in the French struggles, but his point did not go unnoticed by the French Catholics, and it is not a coincidence the fact that his tract was translated and published in French in 1561 by Abbot Jean de Billy, from the Notre Dame de Chatelliers. What was meant by such separation, in the opinion of many ultra-Catholics, was made perfectly clear by Antoine de Mouchy, in his work *Response a quelque apologie*, published in 1560. As far as Mouchy was concerned, one had to “cut off the putrid flesh” so that the body won’t become corrupt and die, and this had to be achieved through the physical extermination of heretics, preferably through burning: “You must cut the rotten flesh and the mad sheep must be chased out of the flock, so that the whole house, the mass, the body and the sheep don’t burn, will not be corrupted, will not rot, nor perish” (Mouchy 1560, 24-25).

Frederick Baumgartner argued that “even though there were some Catholics who preached that a king who favoured the heretics could be deposed, the majority accused the Huguenots of conspiring against the monarchy and argued that obedience towards the Crown was one distinguishing mark between Catholics and heretics. The king was God’s instrument for purifying the realm of heresy” (Baumgartner 1975, 55). It is perfectly true that, at this point in time, we are still very far from the open attacks against the king which were to occur during the time of the League, but, on the other hand, disenchantment with the monarchy was starting to creep in within the Catholic rhetoric – the warnings to the king were still respectful, but they existed nonetheless. In a treatise from 1562, the same René Benoist alluded to the Biblical example of King Ahab, “who allowed his country to be given over to idolatry until his people rose up to overturn the idols” and urged the king not to fear “to remove and destroy the corrupt elements in order to cure the body of his kingdom”, because heresy was “a pernicious and contagious cancer for which there was no remedy but the knife” (Diefendorf 1991, 151-152). The king was expected to eliminate heresy from his kingdom, as he swore at his coronation: the implication was that, if he did not do so, the king

would have been guilty of perjury and the reference to Ahab was a veiled allusion to possible divine vengeance.

The most active personality in the arena of anti-Huguenot propaganda was Simon Vigor⁵, a radical preacher who was extremely active during the 1560s and became archbishop of Narbonne around 1572. His sermons have been collected by his student, Jean Christi, and printed in several volumes⁶. Barbara Diefendorf argues convincingly for Vigor's role in inciting the Parisian population against the Huguenots and points out several instances when he resorts to corporal analogies in order to construct his argument. Albeit cautiously, Vigor did not shy away from criticizing the monarchy's attempts to seek reconciliation with the Huguenots: in order to avoid retaliation and perhaps deterred by the inherent respect for the monarchy which was so deeply rooted within the French polity, Vigor resorted to the tried-and-tested tactic of anyone disgruntled with the king's policies, by criticizing the king's advisors, who, supposedly, were misleading him. Even so, Vigor was still beholden to the common belief of the radical Catholics, namely, that the king's coronation oath and his duty to God constrained his freedom of action when dealing with heretics. As a consequence of this dominating mindset, Vigor could not avoid delivering what was an obvious warning: if the king did not use the sword entrusted to him by God against the heretics, then the sword might be turned against him. The key to understanding the views of Vigor and other such preachers was the unbreakable connection they were establishing between religious truth and political behaviour. In the words of Barbara Diefendorf, heresy threatened "not just individual salvation, but the entire social order" and the sixteenth-century mindset strongly believed that "God will punish those who deviate from His teachings or allow such deviations to take place and His punishment will

⁵ For a brief biographical sketch and an excellent overview of Vigor's preaching activity, see Diefendorf 1987.

⁶ The volumes containing Vigor's sermons are *Sermons et predications chrestiennes et catholiques du S. Sacrement de l'Autel, accomodées pour tous les jours des octaves de la feste Dieu* (Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1577); *Sermons catholiques pour tous les jours de Caresme et feries de Pasques* (Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1580); *Sermons catholiques sur le symbole des Apostres et sur les évangiles des dimanches et festes de l'Advent, faicts en l'Eglise S. Merry a Paris* (Paris: Guillaume Bichon, 1585); *Sermons catholiques sur les dimanches et festes depuis l'octave de Pasques jusques a l'Advent* (Paris: Nicolas du Fossé, 1597). For the second collection, which is referred in this paper, Barbara Diefendorf quotes a 1588 edition, printed at Paris, but there exists an earlier one, printed in 1580 by Nicolas Chesneau. Although published at a much later date, during the reigns of Henry III and Henry IV, the sermons of Simon Vigor quoted in this article were preached during the reign of Charles IX, in late 1560s.

be collective as well as individual”: invoking the evil of the times as a sign of God’s punishment for sin, Vigor argued that, to be restored in God’s grace, it was necessary to cast out the infection of heresy and it was the king’s responsibility to see that this was done (Diefendorf 1991, 153). The preachers certainly felt encouraged by the fact that none of the peace agreements seemed to last and it always came to renewal of hostilities – something which proved, in their opinion, the Huguenots’ untrustworthiness. The radical Catholics had argued strenuously against a conciliation policy on the grounds that it went against God’s commands and the constant failures of the Crown’s efforts in this direction provided them with an apparent vindication: in the words of Nancy Lyman Roelker, this “seemed to demonstrate that efforts to make allowance for reformist ideas beyond the limits set by the Church were not merely futile, but counterproductive” (Roelker 1996, 478).

Vigor’s most elaborate use of corporal metaphors occurs in a sermon entitled *Utique dicetu mihi hanc similitudinem* (*Certes vous me direz ceste similitude*), where he develops the concept of the spiritual physician of the realm. Unlike the rhetoric of most Huguenots, who, as was recognized in modern historiography, tried to stay away from providing a purely Calvinist perspective of their resistance theories, Vigor’s argument has a clear Catholic undertone, where the defence of the Catholic religion and of the Kingdom of France are linked. For Vigor, the passion of Christ is sufficient “medicine” for anyone’s salvation, but in order “to be applied to men”, it requires a correct “disposition” on their part, “just like medicine is good and sufficient in order to heal a sick person, but if he left it on the table and did not took it, it benefits him nothing” (Vigor 1580, 159). This correct “disposition” is identified by Vigor as “fasts, faith and good works”. Following the example of Christ, who, by His sacrifice, provided the salvation of the whole world, it is the task of the priests to attempt to heal the “spiritually sick”, among which the foremost were the heretics. Vigor resorts to this medical imagery in order to justify the exclusion of the heretics from the community: the priests are the only ones to have contact with them and only for the purpose to show them their errors, while all others are required to stay away from heretics, “out of fear of contagion” (Vigor 1580, 160). For Vigor, the Catholic faithful is not equipped to “answer to their [the heretics] objections” (Vigor 1580, 160). The apothecary of the Lord is “the Church” and the medicine is the Word, which can be found in the Gospels, followed by the seven sacraments. However, when administering a cure, two factors need to be taken into consideration:

first, the seriousness of the disease, in this case the gravity of the sin. Vigor points out that, in case of a serious offence against God, a simple penitence does not suffice, but, instead, “it must be hard and long enough in order to heal the mortal wound” and this was the purpose of the Easter fast. Second, the physician, if he intends to heal, must not administer a cure according to the patient’s wishes, but in accordance to what is actually needed. Vigor quotes Saint Augustin, stating that the king and the priest are like a physician and their purpose is to heal, not to kill. In the opinion of Simon Vigor, this metaphor justifies the persecution of the heretics by the Catholics (unlike the persecution of the latter by the former): Vigor acknowledges that the Bible provides examples of how “the good persecuted the bad” and “the bad persecuted the good”, but, in the first case, the purpose is to save the heretic and bring him back into the Church, while in the second case, the goal of the heretics is to “destroy and throw into the abyss” (Vigor 1580, 161). One party (the heretics) does not care how they strike, nor by what right, but those who strike in order to heal, need to take care. However, Vigor is prepared for the eventuality in which all cures will fail and the heretic proves beyond salvation. In such a case, the heretic is described not just as a diseased member of the community, but as “rotten”: in this situation, to keep trying to persuade him by gentle means is a mistake and, instead, it is better that he perishes for the sake of the others who are still healthy. The “rotten member”, the heretic, must be separated from the healthy parts of the community in order to avoid the danger of contagion: “And just like a physician saves and heals the body by cutting the rotten member, be it an arm or a leg, the good physician of the soul, like the king and those who have authority to punish the evil people, they carry out the work of a good physician by punishing those heretics which prove themselves obstinate: so that the Catholics will be free to serve God and will not be infected [...] An incurable wound has to be cut off, so that it will not infect a healthy part” (Vigor 1580, 161v).

The king’s duty to cleanse the realm of heresy, which radical preachers like Vigor constantly pointed to, was consistent with the role attributed to him within the same corporal metaphor: if the heretics were an infectious disease threatening to contaminate the whole, then the king was the physician of this body politic who had to sever the afflicted parts in order to save the rest. This association was even more powerful in the case of the king of France, who was believed to possess healing powers, manifested through simple touch. In the words of Denis Crouzet, “the corporate conception of the society provided legitimacy to the

punishment by death” and the king, as head of the body, had the divine duty, in order to prevent the spread of heresy, to “mutilate and cut off, and had to do evil so that good could reign again in the social body” (Crouzet 2008, 261). This was consistent with the agenda of many of these authors who, as we have seen, appealed to the King to “cure” the kingdom of the affliction of heresy.

Another deployment of the idea of the physical separation of heretics from the body of the realm occurs in a sermon entitled *Si peccaverit in te frater tuus* (*Si ton frère a péché contre toi*). Vigor begins his sermon by emphasizing a gradual process by which the problem of the sinners must be addressed, starting from gentle persuasion and ending with their expulsion from the body of the Church: “Just like that, a physician and surgeon, who have to treat a diseased person in order to cure him, use the sweetest possible means and remedies, before resorting to cautery or incision: but when he sees that there is no other way by which the rest of the body will be saved, then he uses the cautery, not because of cruelty, but because of charity: also the priest who fills the office of physician, as St. Nazianz says, uses all means to heal the sinner. First by sweet words, he tries to convert him: but when he sees that he is stubborn, he starts to rebuke and reprimand him sharply: and when he sees that he did not win him over, he uses his knife and separates him from the Church by his authority and ecclesiastical censure” (Vigor 1580, 167). Unlike the action of the surgeon, the ecclesiastical censure is reversible: the sinner can be reunited again with the body of the Church. Despite this, if all gentle means have failed, the heretic must be separated from the other faithful and, in this, Vigor urges his listeners to pay heed to the Biblical model. Quoting Saint Matthew, Vigor refers to the heretics as “rebels”, who must be punished, after all the means to persuade them have failed. But the highest authority is Christ Himself, whose words Vigor refers to, in order to justify his argument: if the errant Christian proves to be incorrigible, then he must be excluded from the society of Christians and considered as a pagan or publican (Vigor 1580, 167). The necessity of either correcting or, if not possible, of removing the offender is justified by the concept of interdependency between the members of a community, analogous to the relationship between the parts of the human body: “Just like the members form a body, and when we offend a member, like the head, all the others run and feel themselves offended, the tongues cries and the hand tries to parry the blow: likewise, when my Christian brother sins, because the Church is affected, I need to prevent the scandal in the Church, of which I am a member” (Vigor 1580, 169).

Vigor emphasizes that no effort should be spared in order to obtain the conversion of the sinner: to not do so would be, in itself, a major sin. If the sinner (heretic) admits his fault, he can be forgiven, but, “if he does not wish to submit to fraternal correction, then we will excommunicate him and separate him from the others: so that, seeing himself cast out from the community of the faithful, and deprived of the Sacraments, he will admit his fault and ask forgiveness” (Vigor 1580, 170v). Unlike other sinners, though, the heretic can also be considered automatically excommunicated by divine right: therefore, the faithful must separate themselves from the company of the heretic even in the absence of a formal sentence of excommunication (Vigor 1580, 171). The heretic is no longer to be regarded as a brother by the Catholics, because he is no longer tied with them through faith and charity: the heretic is not even a Christian anymore. This separation is necessary for the good of the Church, in order to avoid the danger of contagion: “Second, it is for the good of the Church: because, by contagion, a heretic can destroy many others”. The heretic is no longer in communion with God or a member of the Church, on the contrary, he belongs to the devil (Vigor 1580, 173).

4. Conclusions

The aggressive rhetoric of the Catholic preachers, with their open calls for violence and comparing the Huguenots with a malign element that had to be cut off from the body politic, served to gradually prepare the ground for the events of Saint-Bartholomew and the establishment of the Catholic League (Sălăvăstru 2022, 278). According to Janine Garrisson, “the sense of the peculiarity of Huguenot worship and lifestyle, and the perception of the otherness of a group set apart, were sharpened during the first three Wars of Religion by the taint of treason” (Garrisson 1995, 305-306). However, that was a perception which had been established well before the Wars of Religion, as we have seen in the anti-Protestant edicts issued before the wars, which constantly charged the Protestants with sedition. “Treasonous” and “infectious” were two epithets which were associated by the ultra-Catholics with the Huguenots and, therefore, the latter had to be removed from the body politic in order to preserve the whole. A fundamental aspect of the ultra-Catholic propaganda of this period was the irreversibility of the fall into heresy: traditional Catholic orthodoxy accepted the possibility of abjuration and repentance for the heretic, and many still did, but there were also voices who fiercely rejected this possibility (Sălăvăstru 2022, 278). In the words

of Denis Crouzet, because he left God, the heretic ceased to be a being created in God's image, becoming instead a monster whose body hid the horror and the threat: the risk was not just to allow him to exist among the Catholic faithful, but also to pardon him and accept his abjuration, because he had proven to be corruptible and could always return to his error – therefore, the king was not allowed to pardon him (Crouzet 2008, 259). This imagery of the heretic as a diseased individual infecting the kingdom justified all measures meant to separate him from the rest of the community and from the kingdom: the punishments most often envisioned, banishment or death, had the same finality, removal from the body politic, because heresy, a hopeless and extreme disease, excluded all hope of healing the infected members of the body politic (Crouzet 2008, 267).

According to Stuart Carroll, “during the Middle Ages the spectacle of bodily mutilation and humiliation had been largely incorporated into the panoply of official torture and execution” (Carroll 2006, 174) and it targeted both the bodies of the living and those of the dead. When heresy was involved, such punishments were seen as having a purifying effect, expunging from the body of the Church the seditious parts which had become infectious. The use of these corporal metaphors by Vigor and his brethren to instigate confessional violence, with the declared aim of purifying the realm from heresy, fit very well within this already-existing pattern of corporal punishment: according to Barbara Diefendorf, they “encouraged the murderous impulses of the radicalized population” and “helped create an atmosphere of apocalyptic fervour that allowed normal social restraints to be breached” (Diefendorf 1991, 105). As a result, if the Huguenots directed their anger mostly against the objects employed in the Catholic religious services, in accordance to their belief that their use resembled idolatry and represented a corruption of the purity of the original Christian faith, the Catholics, instead, attacked the persons of the heretics, their bodies, whether alive or dead. In the words of H.G. Koenigsberger, “the religious riots of the sixteenth century were often motivated by the felt need of upholding the proper order of society when others were apparently breaking it down” (Koenigsberger 1974, 4). Catholics who killed Protestants saw themselves as purifying the society and these actions, whether done in opposition or in obedience to a supposed royal policy, represented the political affirmation of Catholic identity and a challenge to the Crown to acknowledge its existence (Garrisson 1995, 307-308). At the peak of the anti-Huguenot violence, during the massacre of St.

Bartholomew, the killings and the desecration of the Huguenot bodies took the meaning of an eschatological purification, which had to cast out the pollution represented by heresy: their mere presence was an attack “against the sacral dimension of a space which has thus been desecrated” and its purity had to be re-established through a ritualistic form of vengeance against the bodies of the Huguenots (Crouzet 2008, 273-274).

A second consequence of the utilization of this corporal imagery in the ultra-Catholic propaganda was the impact upon the person of the king and the institution of the monarchy. St. Bartholomew seemed to finally fulfil the hopes of the ultra-Catholics, of seeing the monarchy firmly embarked on a campaign of eradicating heresy, but, during the reign of Henry III, they were going to be bitterly disappointed. As we already saw, the notions of the kingdom as a body and heresy as a disease also implied the concept of the king as a physician, but, as Henry III apparently failed in this role, the metaphor was turned against him. Obviously, this did not happen overnight and, even during the times of the League, we still find echoes of the old beliefs even in the writings of its members. In 1586, Louis Dorlèans, in his work, *Advertissement des Catholiques Anglois aux François Catholiques*, made extensive use of the same medical terminology, claiming that the “heretic, being a rotten member and corrupted by gangrene, who destroys the neighbouring members and aims for the ruin of the whole body” has to be “cut off”: the one to perform this operation was the king, in whose hands “God placed the sword”, just as he “placed the razor in the hands of the surgeon” (Dorlèans 1586, 21). But, during the open breach between the Catholic League and the monarchy, the same corporal analogies were used to justify not just the destruction of the heresy, but also the removal of the unworthy and tyrannical king who was imperilling the realm. The heresy of the Huguenots and the tyranny of the king became intimately connected in this new wave of ultra-Catholic propaganda. An anonymous pamphlet, *Origine de la maladie de la France avec les remedes propres à la guarison d’icelle, avec une exhortation a l’entretienement de la guerre*, provided recommendations in favour of regicide. According to the author, France was “contaminated by these cursed putrefactions of heresies” and “demanded a cure for removing from its body the bad humours” (*Origine* 1589, 3). The Huguenots represented these evil humours of the realm and countering them was the duty of the king, imposed upon him by his coronation oath, as physician of the realm. The adepts of the Catholic League considered that Henry III was not fulfilling these obligations, asking “What proof of his valour has he ever given against the enemies of

our faith? With his hypocrisy and simulated religion, he has only deceived and cheated us” (*Origine* 1589, 8). Consequently, the king turned from an element that was supposed to protect the body politic into a harmful one and, in such a case, the traditional medical analogy suggested the removal of the part endangering the body politic, in order to avoid the contamination of the whole. The anonymous author of this pamphlet expressed the same idea and he justified his argument by an analogy with the widespread medical procedure of bloodletting (*Origines* 1589, 10; Banks 2009, 209)⁷.

The campaign in favour of the extermination of the Protestants did not yield the results which the ultra-Catholics hoped for during the Wars of Religion, but, even so, it had serious consequences in their aftermath. As proven by the inconclusive results of the repeated wars, the two confessions had to coexist after the Edict of Nantes: but, if eradication proved impossible, the ultra-Catholics resorted to isolation and, for this purpose, the metaphorical language employed during the wars was just as useful. By constantly claiming that the Huguenots “were social contaminants and that heresy threatened to pollute the body of true believers”, a significant boundary was created between the Huguenots and the Catholic majority, while pressure was applied on the former to erase it by conversion (Luria 2005, 141-142).

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⁷ For further reading on the concept of tyranny as a disease and the use of medical analogies for the removal of the tyrant, see also Sălăvăstru 2023.

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