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## **The Rhetoric of Tyrannicide in Early Fifteenth Century France: Jean Gerson's First Reply to the *Justification* of Jean Petit\***

**Abstract:** The problem of tyranny was one of the most complex issues medieval political thought had to contend with. The consensus was that tyranny was evil, against the laws of God and nature, and destructive for the “body politic”, but, at the same time, there was a great deal of hesitation in recommending adequate solutions. The most straightforward ones, sedition and the slaying of the tyrant (“tyrannicide”), naturally made medieval political theorists uncomfortable, because such remedies could have been equally damaging to the common good. In early fifteenth century France, during the power struggle between John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, and Louis, Duke of Orléans, the concept of “tyrannicide” found itself the focus of the French political debate, as the Duke of Burgundy tried in this manner to justify the murder of his rival. Two figures were prominent in this ideological clash: Jean Petit, theologian of the University of Paris, and Jean Gerson, chancellor of the same University. This paper aims to analyze the context of the dispute and the argumentation involved, taking as a case study Petit's own *Justification* of tyrannicide, and the first attack Gerson launched against Petit's doctrine, in a sermon before the Court, called *Rex in sempiternum vive*.

**Keywords:** tyranny, tyrannicide, Jean Gerson, Jean Petit, John the Fearless

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