

Andrei SĂLĂVĂSTRU  
“Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași (Romania)  
Department of Interdisciplinary Research -  
Humanities and Social Sciences

## **Heresy and Tyranny: The Political Discourse of the Radical Catholics During the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598)**

**Abstract:** The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) provided the biggest challenge to the French monarchy since the end of the Hundred Years War. They were characterized by a significant weakening of the central authority, intense factional strife and interference from foreign powers, in particular Spain, but these troubling circumstances also led to the first substantial attempts of reforming the French monarchy on a more constitutional basis, which envisioned a royal power limited by the institutions of the French Crown. To this extent, there was a wide range of political tracts and pamphlets written by both sides in conflict, Huguenot and Catholic. While the former put forward less sectarian theories, the latter focused almost exclusively on the issue of heresy as defining the concept of tyranny: for the radical Catholics, the king's worthiness depended on his attitude on heresy. A king who tolerated heresy or, worse, was a heretic himself was considered *ipso facto* a tyrant, because he would have been in violation either of his own coronation oath, who compelled him to defend the Catholic faith and destroy heresy, or of what many Catholics considered to be a fundamental law of France, that the monarch belong to the Catholic faith. The rhetoric of the Catholic radicals, who coalesced in the Catholic League during the second half of the Wars of Religion, joined these two issues, heresy and tyranny, tightly together, but the lengths they were willing to go to in order to achieve their goals, including accepting a foreign prince on the throne, alienated the rest of the French polity, ensuring their ultimate failure.

**Keywords:** France, Wars of Religion, Catholic League, heresy, tyranny, tyrannicide