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THE INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANT POLITICAL THEORY OF THE REFORMATION PERIOD ON THE LIBERAL CONCEPT OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that J. Locke is considered the founder of the philosophy of freedom, known as “classical liberalism”, which “describes the growth of personal freedom in contrast to the power of the supreme ruler” (Raath & Freitas, 2002, p. 25). This definition of classical liberalism is offered by the modern conservative philosopher R. Scruton. The social contract, the rule of law, and the system of checks and balances were developed solely to protect personal freedom. In other words, the struggle against tyranny and the introduction of limited government were means of achieving the main goal: personal freedoms. Personal freedom is the central concept of liberalism, for the sake of which, essentially, everything else exists. The foundational root of liberal thought, in the interpretation of most liberal theorists, dates back only to the period of the Enlightenment. Liberalism appears to be a spontaneous phenomenon of a prominent intellectual era that arose without any influence from the previous intellectual tradition. A whole galaxy of outstanding thinkers has made titanic efforts to develop mechanisms of control and restraint of power in order to protect human freedom from oppression. That is, this is a problem of Western political identity in general, and in particular, the identity of liberalism as the first modern ideology. The issue addressed in this article precisely concerns the religious factor that influenced the formation of the liberal concept of limited government. That is, this approach tends to overlook the influence of the Christian religion, which had a total significance in the formation of European culture in the Middle Ages and Modern times, and political theory was no exception. That is, this is a problem of Western political identity in general, and in particular the identity of liberalism as the first modern ideology. The issue of this article addresses precisely the religious factor that influenced the formation of the liberal

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concept of limited government. After all, the deconstruction of the theory of the divine right of kings during the Reformation can be called a liberal phenomenon, because, as already mentioned at the beginning, liberalism is “about the growth of personal freedom in contrast to the power of the supreme ruler” (Raath & Freitas, 2002, p. 25).

Introduction

Before proceeding directly to the analysis of the works of religious figures from the Reformation period, it is necessary to briefly outline the achievements of the Middle Ages, without which the tradition of resisting tyranny in the modern era would hardly have been possible.

Acton was convinced that the legacy of the Middle Ages was the deepest and most fundamental reason for the transformation of Western society. “True liberty was not known to any state that had not undergone the medieval influence of the Church. The history of the Middle Ages is the history of the gradual liberation of man from all forms of slavery, and to the extent that the influence of religion became increasingly deep and broad” (Acton, 2019, p. 426). Acton considered the political thought of this period more important for European civilization than the legacy of antiquity, to which political theorists most often refer in their search for the genealogical root of liberty (Acton, 2019, p. 428; Acton, 2024). Although he himself called those times dark, he recognized that the Church often supported absolutism. However, the shortcomings of that era did not prevent an honest and unbiased researcher from seeing its achievements. Although he himself called those times dark, he recognized that the Church often supported absolutism. However, the shortcomings of that era did not prevent an honest and unbiased researcher from seeing its achievements. Acton acknowledged that the Middle Ages failed to fully reform institutions to meet the primary political principle freedom but at least they contributed to “knowledge of political truth” (Acton, 2019, p. 232). Among the achievements of the Middle Ages that concern us, Acton lists the outlines of representative self-government sketched in that era; elections, which, though rather primitive and crude, established the principle of the inseparability of taxation and representation; the near total abolition of slavery; the condemnation and limitation of absolutism; “the right of rebellion was not only admitted but defined as a duty sanctioned by religion” (Acton, 2019, p. 233).

The Reformers continued the medieval tradition, cautiously at first and later with increasing radicalism. By the end of the sixteenth century, supporters of the doctrine of popular sovereignty were strengthening their arguments and positions (Cantoni, 2015; Giesey, 1981). The concept of limited authority and conditional obedience to it became established through the continuity of thought from Catholic medieval authors to Protestant thinkers.

Protestant political theory of the Reformation period

The 17th century can indeed be considered the climax of the medieval struggle for freedom. It was precisely then that the torch of the fight for liberty passed from the Catholic to the Protestant peoples. Lord Acton emphasizes the swiftness

of these changes for people of that era, as at the time, no one could have foreseen “the fact that by the end of the century, the three most important countries on the planet would be those that owed much of their development to the achievements of the Reformation (Kattsoff, 1949). Thus, in religion, as in many other fields, the recent centuries have favored the forces of innovation, with the center of gravity of civilization shifting from the Mediterranean to the oceanic peoples, from the Latin to the Teutonic nations, and from Catholicism to Protestantism” (Avgustin, 1998, p. 11).

The central figure of the Reformation was undoubtedly Luther. However, his political views were not distinguished by progressiveness; on the contrary, he contributed to the fact that in Lutheran countries, the church became a support for political regimes and lacked the moral strength and sufficient authority to limit the abuse of power. During his life, Luther was unable to free himself from the political patronage of his protectors. Likewise, throughout its entire history, his church remained in the shadow of the state.

We are primarily interested in the reformed branch of the Reformation, for it was within its framework that the boldest political theory developed, elevating Christian views on limited governance and the right to resist ungodly rulers to a new level. Every radical political movement aimed at resisting absolutism originates from this tradition, such as the Huguenots in France, the Puritans in England, the Presbyterians in Scotland, and the rebellious followers of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands who stood against the oppression of the Spanish crown.

Ulrich Zwingli is considered the father of the Reformed political tradition, “whose political theology had a great influence in Europe and England, not only through the development of an alternative approach to secular politics, but also due to the sharp reaction to the idea of unlimited secular governance” (Ponet, 2017, p. 1). Elements of his views, transmitted through Jean Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger, were later transferred to English and Scottish political thought and to the Reformed tradition as a whole (Ponet, 2017, p. 1). Apart from this indirect influence, his impact was rather limited, since he died at a relatively young age and thus did not have time to significantly affect the political aspect of Protestantism (Acton, 2019, p. 236).

First, let us note some of the negative aspects of Zwingli’s political thought. Following Acton’s logic, according to which any merging of secular power and politics threatens freedom, Zwingli’s teachings, had his life not been tragically cut short, could have become the opposite extreme of Luther’s doctrine of the “two kingdoms”. While Luther disarmed the church before secular authority, Zwingli professed the primacy of the church over the state, or more precisely, their fusion into a totally Christian community in which “the elders of the New Testament were equivalent to the magistrates of his time”. Thus, the city governing body of a Christian city ruled not only the municipality but also the church (Ponet, 2017, p. 4).

This assumption is hypothetical, and as is well known, history does not recognize the subjunctive mood; therefore, let us focus on the elements of Zwingli’s political thought that had a positive impact on the establishment of political freedom.

In contrast to the theory of the divine right of kings, Zwingli associates political authority with the obligation to do God’s will (Ponet, 2017, p. 6). Otherwise, “without

fear of God, the magistrate becomes a tyrant” (Ponet, 2017, p. 7). However, even a criminal regime should be obeyed (provided there are no lawful means to remove it) as long as its directives are not set against God and His will. Should its orders contradict God’s will, then “Christians should rather die than submit”, because for Zwingli, “the fundamental truth is that Christians must obey God rather than people, which means that God’s commandments take precedence over all other commands” (Ponet, 2017, p. 7).

Thus, Zwingli called for disobedience; yet, he excluded active popular resistance to tyranny, let alone the killing of a tyrant. Nevertheless, he believed that God would surely avenge His people and would send His chosen one for this mission. With such a direct sanction from the Almighty, tyrannicide becomes justified. This interpretation left ample room for further free interpretation. In other words, anyone could proclaim themselves God’s chosen one, especially since Protestantism, by its very nature, allowed for various interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and personal revelations to Christians from the Holy Spirit. Not to mention the ancient Christian principle of independent conscience, which was gaining new relevance at the time and later became fundamental for nonconformists. Thus, although Zwingli did not give direct permission for active resistance by the people or an active segment of society against criminal authority, one exception to the rule made such actions inevitable, given the free-thinking nature of the Protestant environment.

Overall, Zwingli’s attitude toward tyranny is unambiguous: “tyranny goes against the will of God; such rulers rob the poor through taxes and treat their subjects not as people, but as animals, or even worse” (Ponet, 2017, p. 8).

Zwingli’s political views were further developed by his successor and student, Heinrich Bullinger, who also drew on J. Calvin. It was specifically through Bullinger’s interpretation that Zwingli’s ideas spread among the English Puritans, for whom Bullinger’s work “The Decades” became a foundational text. We will not analyze the key tenets of Bullinger’s teaching on limited government in detail, as they mostly differ from Zwingli’s only in wording.

Instead, it is worth focusing in detail on Jean Calvin, the most influential figure in Reformed Protestantism. Like Zwingli, Calvin adheres to the view of dependence on God and independence from external control of human conscience, as well as the principle that “obedience to man should not be disobedience to God” (Ponet, 2017, p. 13). A ruler who issues orders that directly contradict the will of God thereby makes his rule illegitimate (Ponet, 2017, p. 13).

This is how J. Calvin formulates this principle in his fourth book, “Institutes of the Christian Religion”: “We must submit to those who rule over us – yet only in God. But if they issue a command that is against God, it has no authority”. (Acton, 1948, p. 1238). In doing so, Calvin reaffirmed his commitment to the ancient Christian principle that protected the conscience of believers from the encroachments of ungodly authority. Most importantly, Calvin deprived the ungodly ruler of legitimacy, “because a king who has exceeded his authority has not only harmed the people but also gone against God, thereby nullifying his own power” (Acton, 1948, p. 1238). Nevertheless, Calvin

urged his followers not to presumptuously assume the role of avengers themselves (Ponet, 2017, p. 14). In this, he in no way differs from Zwingli. He understands that it is God Himself who removes the ungodly from their thrones, whether through conscious or unconscious instruments of His will. And by their actions, they do not violate God's decree to obey authority, for (armed from heaven, they subject a lesser authority to a greater one, just as kings are permitted to punish their subordinates). Nevertheless, Calvin urges his followers not to presumptuously assume the role of avengers themselves (Ponet, 2017, p. 14).

It even seems that Calvin is "extremely reluctant to allow for the possibility of active resistance to tyranny, regardless of its form", and thus, his position on this issue is less explicit than that of Zwingli and Bullinger (Ponet, 2017, p. 15). Yet, even his arguments regarding the illegitimacy of ungodly authority, given Calvin's influence within the Reformed tradition, were sufficient for his followers to develop his teachings in those areas where he, whether consciously or not, was insufficiently clear specifically, on active resistance and the killing of tyrants. Calvin's followers somewhat distanced themselves from him because of the pragmatism of their political philosophy (Brutus, n.d., p. 5). After the tragic events of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, French Protestants began developing theological foundations for the people's right to resist tyrants. "These ideas were expanded and developed by Calvin's French followers. All of them, François Hotman, Théodore Beza, and Philippe du Plessis-Mornay emphasized this very idea: tyrants must be resisted" (Goodman, 2002, p. 187).

Lord Acton clarifies that this doctrine was pointed out to the French Huguenots by the English bishop J. Ponet, as well as by Knox and Buchanan, who had been taught by their mentor J. Calvin, who, in turn, adopted it from the medieval schools (Acton, 2019, p. 237). Acton's explanation aims to demonstrate the continuity of the tradition of resistance to tyranny, but it is not sufficiently comprehensive, as it omits other key figures who contributed to the development of the theology of resistance, for example, the already mentioned Zwingli and Bullinger, and others as well. Incidentally, Alister McGrath places Christopher Goodman, another Englishman, on the same level as J. Ponet's "A Short Treatise of Political Power" (1556), referencing his own treatise "How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed" (1558) (Goodman, 2002, p. 196).

These two outstanding works justified the legitimacy of rebellion against tyrants and developed theological foundations for their physical elimination. This influenced not only the famous anonymous Huguenot treatise "Defense Against Tyrants" (1579), attributed to Philippe de Mornay, but also the Puritan uprising and the execution of Charles I, and, more broadly, English political theory, particularly that of J. Locke (Wagner & Schmid, 2011, p. 884).

Notably, John Calvin died in 1564, while John Ponet wrote his treatise eight years earlier, in 1556. This means that Calvin witnessed the initial stage of the radicalization of his political doctrine by his followers. Christopher Goodman wrote his tyrannicide treatise as an English religious exile in Geneva, that is, in the very "capital of

Calvinism”, at a time when Calvin was actively sending missionaries to Europe to spread Reformed teachings. Christopher Goodman was also a friend of another prominent reformer, John Knox. These two religious refugees from the British Isles, inspired by Geneva’s republican system, sought the same kind of freedom for their homeland. Armed with their pens, they set out to overthrow tyrants. In the same year that Goodman’s work was published, his companion John Knox released his own famous treatise aimed against the tyrannical rule of women. As is well known, at that time, England was ruled by Mary, who earned the nickname “Bloody” for her harsh persecution of Protestants, while Scotland was ruled by the more moderate yet still hostile to Protestantism, Queen Mary Stuart.

Next, we will focus more on the authors involved in the radicalization of Reformed political thought. Calvin did not agree with Knox’s position on the inadmissibility of female rule. Lord Acton called such a position one that undermined freedom. However, in this study, it is more important to focus not on Knox’s misogyny, but on the tyrannicide aspect of his work. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of his theological arguments concern the criticism of gynocracy; Knox also displays a clear aversion to tyranny as a whole. In the concluding part of the treatise, there is a passage that essentially repeats the idea expressed by J. Ponet two years earlier about the necessity of killing tyrants. Knox mentions the victims of tyranny in his homeland: “who cannot be forgotten, who have been consumed by the fire and sword of tyranny”, and goes on to add about God’s retribution for the blood of the innocently slain, which “cries out for vengeance to God; but also the laments and tears of the oppressed, the groans of God’s angels, as well as every earthly creature injured by their tyranny, constantly cry out and call for the swiftest execution of such (i.e., tyrants)” (Camion, 2009, p. 26).

Noxus became an instrument against tyranny himself, for after returning from exile, he became the recognized religious leader of the Scottish Protestants and succeeded in turning his homeland toward the Presbyterian faith, ensuring that monarchical power knew its limits. Thus, one of his followers, Melville, the rector of St. Andrews University, during a dispute between King James and the leaders of the Scottish church, at one point “grabbed James by the hand and angrily called him God’s foolish vassal”. Then Melville “declared that he and his colleagues would continue to honor James as king publicly, but privately they all understood well that the true king of Scotland is Christ, and His kingdom is the Church; as for James, in this kingdom, he is a mere subject, not a lord and not the head” (Goodman, 2002, p. 171).

Such a democratic spirit among Presbyterians was connected not only with theological emphases but also with the internal organization of Reformed churches, whose principles, it is believed, John Knox extended to the political sphere. “Knox went further, attempting to transfer into the political realm ideas that Calvin had limited only to the sphere of church governance. Knox took the idea of representative government characteristic of Reformed churches, which were communities led by elected elders or “presbyters”, and applied this democratic principle at the political level...” (Goodman, 2002, p. 137). The author of this quote, Alister McGrath, goes

on to emphasize that this was the result of the influence of the ideas of the Geneva Republic, as well as the fact that these ideas affected the English Civil War of the 17th century (Goodman, 2002, p. 137). In other words, the Puritans, among whom Presbyterians constituted a significant portion. As we will see further, there is a clear link between the Puritans and liberals, and therefore between Knox's democratic principles and the liberal concept of limited government.

Another thinker who influenced the Puritans, in particular their execution of Charles I, was John Ponet (Goodman, 2002, p. 196). As previously noted, two years before Knox, he conducted a thorough analysis of tyranny and, relying on the authority of the Holy Christian text, sanctioned the permissibility of executing a tyrant. John Ponet was convinced that Almighty God hates, condemns, and administers His stern judgment upon those who abuse the power granted by Him and deceive and destroy those poor sheep who place their trust in them as His ministers (Knox, 2020, p. 9). Like any classical Christian author, Ponet traces the origin of the state to God's ordinance, established to restrain evil through the action of law and the monopoly on coercion. However, in this matter, Ponet emphasized just authority, similar to Augustine, who once remarked that without justice, the state becomes a band of robbers. Incidentally, in another anti-tyranny treatise, "Defence Against Tyrants", which we will examine further, there is a direct reference to this Augustine quote.

Although Ponet does not refer to Augustine, the direction of their thoughts is clearly similar. The Englishman, however, does not stop at the moral condemnation of the injustice of authority but declares its illegitimacy. If a power, which is called by God to uphold justice, is itself unjust, then it is criminal and therefore must be punished, just like any criminal who breaks the law (Knox, 2020, p. 21). J. Ponet places direct responsibility on Christians for upholding political justice. Ponet appeals to some unknown noble sage, who claims that a good citizen does no evil, but better than him is the one who does not allow others to harm and insult the innocent. "For retribution for innocent blood is not only upon those who shed it, but also on those who enact evil laws and agree with them" (Knox, 2020, p. 19).

Once again, there are clear parallels with Augustine's idea that God punishes Christians together with pagans during epidemics, natural disasters, and wars because of their indifference to the injustice of the society in which they live (McGrath, 2017, pp. 14–15). It is remarkable that a sixteenth-century Anglican bishop addressed a problem that twentieth-century scholars of totalitarianism wrestled with the issue of the collective responsibility of the masses for the crimes of autocratic regimes. However, Ponet does not hide ordinary executors and accomplices behind ambiguous formulations like "the banality of evil". Notably, Ponet operated with a far smaller body of knowledge, and a single biblical text sufficed for him. His treatise is especially filled with quotations from Old Testament prophets ancient fighters against tyrants. In this interpretation, the individual gains more agency than in modern interpretations, where their role is reduced to that of a cog in the system. This strand of religious and political thought is so demanding of the ordinary person because it sees in them a self-sufficient image and likeness of God, endowed with

an independent ability to discern between good and evil and possessing the right to choose between these two alternatives on their own.

True Christians submit to the truth and oppose wickedness, even at the cost of their own lives (Knox, 2020, p. 34). Ponet equates resistance to ungodly authority with religious martyrdom, aligning it with the great Christian tradition in which loyalty to God was valued above all else (Knox, 2020, p. 34).

Ponet includes in the Christian's duty to watch over justice the responsibility of ensuring that a subject looks after the ruler, so that the latter does not usurp power. If, for some reason, this cannot be prevented, then the subject is obliged to punish the tyrant in such a way that his successors are not tempted to follow the same path. Everything Ponet does is simply to universalize the preventive function of punishment: the execution of a murderer reduces the number of those wishing to kill, and likewise, the execution of a tyrant curbs the insatiable appetite for power among future monarchs.

Ponet argues that God and the country are more important than the king, and that the state can flourish without him. Conversely, the king cannot exist without the state. "The commonwealth and the kingdom may go on living even when the head has been cut off, and may (if necessary) put on a new head" (Knox, 2020, p. 32). Ponet believes this assertion is self-evident to everyone: "This law speaks to every person's conscience, that it is natural to cut off a diseased part of the body which could destroy the whole body. Kings, princes, and other rulers, though they are the heads of the political body, are nevertheless not the whole body... It is not the people who exist for them, but they who exist for the people" (Knox, 2020, p. 49).

The very tone of Ponet's treatise demonstrates how deeply the author is imbued with the idea of the equality of all people before God (an old Christian truth revitalized by the Reformation), that he sees no difference at all between a petty thief and a thief on the throne. And if the law sentences one to the highest punishment, then on what grounds should the king not lose his head for a similar crime?

Several years after the publication of J. Ponet's treatise, the arguments against tyranny were reinforced by another Englishman, C. Goodman. Goodman draws attention to an important aspect that J. Ponet overlooked, yet it is crucial for understanding why the theory of the divine right of kings enjoyed such wild popularity in the Christian world despite lacking a biblical foundation. According to C. This passage is central to the author, and on this basis, he develops his concept of defiance against tyrants.

This passage is central for the author, and on this basis, he develops his concept of defiance against tyrants. Faithfulness to God's truth is the ultimate value for a Christian. Christopher Goodman sees an example of such devotion to God, rather than blind obedience to humans, in Acts 4:2 (Calvin, n.d., p. 29). This passage is central for the author, and on this basis, he develops his concept of defiance against tyrants. The general meaning of this concept is that disobedience to the wicked is true obedience to God (Calvin, n.d., p. 29). Like Ponet, Goodman shares the responsibility for the crimes of authorities with the common people, who through servile obedience become accomplices in lawlessness (Calvin, n.d., p. 29).

To avoid complicity in the criminal actions of the political authorities and the passive majority, mere condemnation is insufficient. Dissent must be active, that is, directed action against evil. For Peter and John not only verbally expressed their disagreement with the prohibition to preach the Gospel, but after being released, acted in defiance of the ungodly order (Calvin, n.d., p. 20). According to Goodman, Daniel is an example of the same kind of demonstrative disobedience to an ungodly decree. Daniel not only violated the prohibition but did so demonstratively, with “open disdain for royal arrogance” (Calvin, n.d., p. 21).

For Goodman, it is not enough to simply refrain from killing, stealing, or bearing false witness in order to fully observe God’s commandments. A true Christian must also resist the wickedness of others in order to “save and preserve both the lives and property of our brothers and neighbors” (Calvin, n.d., p. 21). Such an approach to following the Lord’s commandments is quite unconventional and rarely found in the writings of Christian authors, especially in treatises focused on opposing tyranny. This is, without exaggeration, a radical interpretation, as it emphasizes the willful, active aspects of the Christian religion and encourages social and political engagement.

Ponet was radical because he was the first to insist on the legitimacy of executing a tyrant, yet Goodman made it the duty of every conscientious Christian, who has no right to stand aside in the face of social injustice. Goodman calls upon all of God’s faithful not to pay attention to the absence of official authority to administer justice, but to use the authority granted by God Himself to take up the sword and become an instrument of God in punishing evil rulers (Calvin, n.d., p. 46). This was a radical leap away from Zwingli, Bullinger, and, in particular, Calvin, who spoke of God’s retribution against tyrants but warned that no one should take on such a role of their own accord. However, as we see with Goodman, it became the duty of all true Christians to voluntarily participate in God’s judgment of tyrants.

Ponet’s and Goodman’s ideas influenced French Huguenots, who were seeking apologetic grounds for resisting Catholic oppression, and such a basis was provided by the treatise “Defence Against Tyrants” (“Vindiciae contra tyrannos”, 1579). This work begins with the apologetics of independent conscience, a fundamental Christian doctrine that, according to Acton, played the most important role in the quest for freedom in the West.

The author of the treatise “Vindiciae contra tyrannos” (“Defence Against Tyrants”, 1579), published anonymously but most commonly attributed to Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, appeals to the authority of the biblical text, the most authoritative source of the time, to remind tyrants that God stands above them and that their power is therefore accountable and clearly limited. He refers to the Book of Hosea 5:10-11, in which God, through the prophet, addresses the wicked rulers of Judah, accusing them of overstepping the bounds of their authority. In their insatiability, they considered the power granted to them by the “Almighty and All-Good God” insufficient, and they usurped the sovereign authority over the people, which belongs to God alone (Scruton, 2022, p. 3).

Next, the thinker links the idea of popular sovereignty with a conscience independent from political control: “Not content with absolute power over the lives and property of their subjects, these tyrants have usurped a right which belongs to Jesus Christ alone the Lord of human conscience” (Scruton, 2022, p. 3). This quote demonstrates how the idea of conscience was an extremely powerful weapon that enabled a person to escape complete subjugation to political authority. Rights, dignity, and freedom are bestowed by Jesus Christ himself; therefore, human beings are accountable only to Him. Obedience to earthly rulers is possible only within the bounds of the Christian moral and ethical code. If the authorities demand its violation, that is, actions against one’s conscience, then “who would doubt that we obey all, without exception, of God’s commandments, but not all human ones?” After all, “the Apostles themselves replied that one must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29” (Scruton, 2022, p. 3).

This principle applies not only to individuals but also to entire nations, which must be mindful of obedience to the truth and the protection of what is God’s from the encroachments of Caesar. Otherwise, “the people offer incense and worship earthly gods, and instead of resisting such rulers, the people allow them to usurp the power of God” (Scruton, 2022, p. 3). Here, we see one of the earliest reminders of the separation between the church and the state, which is based on the fundamental principle voiced by Jesus Christ in his discussion with the Jewish religious elite. More importantly, the responsibility for upholding this principle has been delegated by God to the people.

For Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin, obedience to the authority of an ungodly ruler was unconditional, except in cases where orders directly contradicted the will of God. In other words, it is not the competence of an ordinary subject to judge the sins of the king, for even ungodly authority ensures God’s order in human society. This argument relies on chapter 13 of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, where God’s will regarding the function of political power is clearly outlined: it is entrusted with the responsibility to punish the wrongdoer. However, for the author of the treatise “Defense Against Tyrants”, this is not enough power to lawfully punish a criminal must not itself be criminal. Only in this case is such authority considered legitimate. “Thus, we understand that kings should be obeyed for God’s sake, not against God, and only when they serve and obey God, not the other way around” (Scruton, 2022, p. 5). “The command to obey the king makes sense only if the king is God’s servant for our good” (Scruton, 2022, p. 14).

Thus, we see that defiance against an ungodly ruler is not only not a sin but is, in fact, a duty before God for every pious subject. Moreover, the sin falls upon the shoulders of the ungodly king, who was the first to break his obligations before God and His people; therefore, the rebels become an instrument in the hands of God for righteous retribution (Scruton, 2022, p. 13).

As we have seen, early Reformed political thought only allowed for the possibility of such resistance and even then, only by those singled out by the finger of God. No one had the right to consciously and willfully take on such a mission. The Huguenots

crossed this line and declared that they were precisely these chosen ones. Listening to the religious truth revealed to them through the Holy Text and their conscience, they are obliged to overthrow the mortal who has proclaimed himself a “god”.

As we have seen, the tyrannicide advocated by Protestant authors is a continuation of the medieval tradition, according to which “the right of subjects to deprive rulers who have violated the original contract between them of their power was affirmed” (Acton, 2019, p. 243). However, John Ponet, Christopher Goodman, and the anonymous author of the treatise “Defence Against Tyrants” significantly specify and at the same time radicalize Christian political thought. To summarize, it is worth highlighting the following main aspects of the teachings of the early Protestant advocates of tyrannicide:

- No ruler holds power over human freedom. On the contrary, the state is obligated to safeguard freedom. If it fails to do so, or worse, if the political authority itself begins to encroach upon freedom, it loses its legitimacy.

- There should be a healthy distrust toward political authority, since it is composed of sinful people prone to passions. Only that authority which is limited and controlled is legitimate.

- The state must act strictly within the bounds of its competence and must not interfere in matters of human conscience, that is, it should not infringe upon faith or beliefs.

- The source of the law is not the king, but God. Thus, the law stands above the king.

- Political authority must act within the framework of Christian moral law, and its actions are assessed according to this standard.

- Tyrannical and arbitrary power must be removed and punished according to the law.

- Rebellion is not so much a right as a moral obligation, a call of conscience for free people.

In fact, all these provisions are important components of the evolutionary process by which the individual was liberated from the tyranny of the supreme ruler, the quintessence of which was the emergence of liberal theory. Thus, in the teachings of tyrant-slayers during the Reformation period, we can trace the initial elements of the concept of limited government. Building on this rich theoretical legacy and the practical struggle against tyranny, by the seventeenth century, “Puritan authors easily and effortlessly deconstructed the idea of the divine right of kings, pointing out its lack of biblical foundation” (Goodman, 2002, p. 188). It was the English Puritans who became the most determined opponents of tyranny, both in theory and in real political struggle, thereby laying the foundations for a limited monarchy, which was established several decades later (Acton, 2019, p. 368). These ideas were further developed in the second half of the seventeenth century by the Whigs, an English political group that chose liberty as the cornerstone of their identity. Whig John Locke is considered the progenitor of liberalism, and notably, his first treatise, which laid the foundation of liberal theory, is an anti-tyrannical work. In fact, John Locke ended the anti-tyrannical tradition of previous centuries. This marked a turning point in

history, when the balance of power shifted toward personal liberty in the age-old struggle with the authority of the supreme ruler. This, in essence, is the meaning of classical liberalism as defined by R. Scruton, whose quotation opened this article (Raath & Freitas, 2002, p. 25).

Conclusion

Overall, Puritanism and Whiggism deserve special attention, as they had the most profound influence on classical liberalism, or more precisely, on the liberalism of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. However, this falls outside the scope and focus of this article, as Puritanism is a post-Reformation phenomenon, and Whiggism is, in fact, a political rather than a religious movement.

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ВПЛИВ ПРОТЕСТАНТСЬКОЇ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ ТЕОРІЇ ПЕРІОДУ РЕФОРМАЦІЇ НА ЛІБЕРАЛЬНИЙ КОНЦЕПТ ОБМЕЖЕНОГО ВРЯДУВАННЯ

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Дж. Лока традиційно розглядають як родоначальника філософії свободи, відомої під назвою, яка «розповідає про зростання особистої свободи на противагу владі верховного правителя» (Raath & Freitas, 2002, р. 25). Таке визначення класичному лібералізму дає консервативний філософ Р. Скрутон. І попри лаконічність, це вкрай влучна характеристика цієї філософської традиції. Ця дефініція вказує на серцевинну ідею ліберальної думки, її найбільший здобуток та її генеалогію. Особиста свобода – осьовий концепт лібералізму, заради якого, власне, існує все інше. Суспільний договір, верховенство права, система стримування і проти-ваг – механізми, які розробляли виключно з метою захисту особистої свободи. Іншими словами, боротьба з тиранією та запровадження обмеженого врядування були засобами досягнення головної цілі – особистих свобод. Ціла плеяда видатних мислителів доклала титанічних зусиль для розроблення механізмів контролю і стримування влади, аби вберегти людську свободу від гніту. Генеалогічний корінь ліберальної думки (в інтерпретації більшості ліберальних теоретиків) сягає тільки періоду Просвітництва. І складається враження, що лібералізм – це спонтанний феномен видатної інтелектуальної епохи, що виник без жодного впливу попередньої інтелектуальної традиції. Тобто такий підхід чомусь ігнорує вплив християнської релігії, яка мала тотальне значення у формуванні європейської культури в період Середньовіччя та Нового часу, і політична теорія не була винятком. Тобто це проблема західної політичної ідентичності загалом, а також, зокрема, ідентичності лібералізму як першої модерної ідеології. Проблематика цієї статті звертається саме до релігійного чинника, який вплинув на формування ліберального концепту обмеженого врядування. Адже деконструкцію теорії божественного права королів у період Реформації можна назвати ліберальним явищем, бо, як уже було зазначено, лібералізм – це «про зростання особистої свободи на противагу владі верховного правителя» (Raath & Freitas, 2002, р. 25).

Ключові слова:

обмежене врядування, особиста свобода, тиранія, Реформація, лібералізм.

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