Sacral Kingship between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment

Studies in British and Imperial History
Published for the German Historical Institute, London
Editor: Andreas Gestrich, Director of the German Historical Institute, London

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SACRAL KINGSHIP BETWEEN DISENCHANTMENT AND RE-ENCHANTMENT

The French and English Monarchies 1587–1688

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Ronald G. Asch

berghahn
NEW YORK • OXFORD
www.berghahnbooks.com

Published in 2014 by
Berghahn Books
www.berghahnbooks.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Asch, Ronald G.
Sacral kingship between disenchantment and re-enchantment: the French and English monarchies 1587-1688 / Ronald G. Asch.
pages cm. -- (Studies in British and Imperial history: publications of the German Historical Institute, London; volume 2)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-78238-356-7 (hardback: acid-free paper) – ISBN 978-1-78238-357-4 (ebook)
1. Kings and rulers--Religious aspects. 2. Divine right of kings. 3. Monarchy--Great Britain--History--17th century. 4. Monarchy--France--History--17th century. 5. Monarchy--Religious aspects.
I. Title.
JC389.A83 2014
320.94109'032--dc23
2013044576

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed on acid-free paper

ISBN 978-1-78238-356-7 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-78238-357-4 (ebook)

MAGISTRO
SOCIISQUE
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SANCTAE MARIAE MINORI
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For a tenured professor of history in the German academic system, it is not easy to find the courage to write something that aspires to be more than a textbook or a general survey of an entire period. In fact, after a certain stage in their careers, professors are hardly expected to produce such works. The fact that I nevertheless managed to write this book is at least in part due to the German *Exzellenzinitiative* – a vast campaign which aimed to improve the German academic system, or at least to transform it beyond all recognition. Later historians of higher education will undoubtedly look at the *Exzellenzinitiative* with some bewilderment. Apart from the politicians responsible for it, few people today would call it an unqualified success. In the end, too much money was spent in the same way as a baroque prince might have organized a gigantic fireworks display, or a great festival at court. However, there is no denying that the three additional sabbaticals it enabled me to spend in the School of History at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies during the period 2008 to 2011 gave me the chance to work on a subject I have always found fascinating, the transformation of the sacral character of royal power in the seventeenth century. This book could not have been written without this opportunity in this environment. I am also grateful to the Cluster *Normative Orders* at the University of Frankfurt am Main, also a product of the *Exzellenzinitiative*, which invited me to spend six months in Bad Homburg in 2010 to write the last chapter of my book, and to my colleague, Luise Schorn-Schütte, who was my host during this time. I very much enjoyed my time in Bad Homburg and still vividly remember the mornings in my office with a clear view of the Frankfurt skyline. My thanks must also go to Mark Greengrass, a Fellow in the School of History at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies in 2010/11, who read most of this book before publication and gave me invaluable advice, and to Angela Davies, who took great care to polish my English. I am further grateful to the German Historical Institute London, of which I was once a Fellow, and its Director Andreas Gestrich for accepting this book into their new English-language publication series. I also remember with pleasure the fortnight in 2010 that I spent in Paris at the Institut Historique Allemand as a Karl Ferdinand Werner Fellow.

I dedicate this work to Selwyn College and to the church and parish of Little St Mary's Cambridge, which in different ways have offered me generous and unquestioning hospitality, and provided me with sustenance both intellectual

and spiritual over so many years since the 1980s, in both good times and in more troubled days. My particular thanks go to John Morrill, whose advice has been extremely helpful to me whenever I visited Selwyn College, and to David Smith, who has always made me feel welcome in Cambridge.

German institutes of advanced studies come and go, but the University of Cambridge, of which Selwyn College is a part, will survive. The gates of hell, that is, misguided educational policies, will ultimately not prevail against her, or so one must hope.

Freiburg im Breisgau, All Saints' Day 2012

INTRODUCTION

In an important work on the secularization of politics and society in early modern and modern Europe, the French historian and sociologist Marcel Gauchet wrote in the 1980s: 'La prose des bureaux se substitue à la poésie du prince' (the prose of bureaucracy replaces the poetry of the prince). Gauchet argued that as the state's administrative structures became more efficient and their coercive power greater, the need to integrate society through symbolic acts and rituals and a shared religious system of meanings and practices became less pronounced, and political culture changed accordingly.[1] This is a familiar thesis, and one that has greatly influenced our perception of political power and authority in the early modern period. Monarchy, once protected by a sacral aura, was, it seems, disenchanted and gradually lost its religious legitimation. This was achieved either in a slow and gradual process which reduced the monarch to a mere head of state, no longer God's image on earth but all too human in every respect, or by a political upheaval, as in France in 1789–93 and England in 1649, when monarchy was desacralized by an act of regicide. Such direct attacks on monarchy, however, were only possible because the state itself had long since been conceptually separated from the person of the prince. An abstract state or, alternatively, the idea of the nation as an autonomous political community, replaced the idea that the monarch alone embodied both state and nation, and that the body politic of the commonwealth was subsumed in the king's body natural.[2]

We should, however, be cautious about interpreting the history of the long seventeenth century as one of relentless secularization combined with an ineluctable disenchantment of monarchy itself, paving the way for the triumph of the impersonal modern state.[3] There is no doubt that in the late seventeenth century not just the papacy, but also other ecclesiastical bodies and authorities which

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Notes for this chapter begin on page 167.

claimed the right to impose their rules and judgements on the world met with increasing resistance. Moreover, the move away from an 'enchanted world' in which 'charged objects have causal power in virtue of their intrinsic meanings' to a more materialistic and mechanistic view of the world certainly became more pronounced during this period.[4] This was bound to diminish the armoury of symbols and rituals which kings could use to represent their authority as God-given, or at least to decrease its efficiency. On the other hand, over the last two or three decades, research has often emphasized the extent to which the hardening of confessional front lines and the growth of confessional churches were linked to the process of building stronger structures of secular authority in early modern Europe. Far from being a product of secularization, the state, in this interpretation, owed its increasing power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to its alliance with the church and its ability to impose distinct rules of religious worship, thought and behaviour on its subjects.[5] Although at present scholars are more sceptical about the idea of confessionalization – at least as far as the actual ability of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities to shape social behaviour and patterns of belief is concerned – and its link with the state-building process,[6] it nevertheless remains true that as late as the eighteenth century very few states could do without some kind of church established by law (although toleration might, perhaps, be granted to minorities).

England, in particular, while reasonably tolerant in its treatment of Protestant Dissenters after 1688 (although much less so in its policy towards Catholics), was still in many ways a confessional state in which religious and denominational allegiances had a considerable capacity to rouse political passions; much more so, often, than merely secular differences of opinion.[7] Although less controversial and prominent, perhaps, with regard to public representations of kingship than in the preceding century, the religious foundations of royal authority remained of considerable importance for monarchy as an institution well beyond the early eighteenth century.[8]

However, religion was not necessarily a factor for stability. Religious conflicts retained the potential fundamentally to undermine political stability, even when political thought and the practice of politics had seemingly become more secularized in the eighteenth century. The tensions between the French crown and *parlements* in the mid-eighteenth century can hardly be understood without taking into account Jansenism's contribution in exacerbating them; 'a quasi-religious war' and the advent of a new political religion, patriotism and the cult of republican virtue in the later eighteenth century and during the French Revolution were required really to desacralize the French monarchy, which still retained its sacral aura despite the widely publicized personal shortcomings of Louis XV and his successor.[9]

The undeniable tendency to conceive of the political order in more abstract terms during the early modern period – that is, to distinguish more clearly between the person of the ruler and the state or kingship as such – was itself to some extent an outcome of the crisis of legitimacy which confessional strife and civil wars had produced in the sixteenth century. This could work both ways. It could reduce the monarch to the position of a mere office holder who was accountable to his own subjects. But it could also be argued that the power of the king's body politic in its timeless perfection would purge the monarch's body natural of whatever defects or deficiencies could be imputed to it, including the weakness of female gender, questionable religious allegiance or even a disputed right of inheritance.[10] Thus the evolving relationship between a state conceived in more abstract, objective terms on the one hand, and allegiance to the individual monarch and dynastic loyalty on the other remained far more complicated, not to say dialectical, than might be assumed. Or, to quote Marcel Gauchet again, though on a different note: 'Over two centuries, one can observe, involved in a secret and deadly contradiction, a monarchy of abstraction which works to render the state more impersonal, and a monarchy of incarnation, revived in its tendency to rely on dynastic identity, confronted by the new challenge to ensure continuity.'[11]

The confessional conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could, indeed, increase the need to observe the strictest rules of dynastic inheritance, thereby reinforcing the dynastic principle. Only this could prevent a civil war, or put end to it, as in France in the 1590s. Far from necessarily disenchanting monarchy and undermining its religious legitimation, these conflicts could also reinforce the monarch's role as a heroic and providential defender of the godly, a zealous persecutor of heretics and a sacerdotal ruler, both king and priest.

This study, therefore, intends neither to chart the relentless triumph of a secular or secularizing state, nor the incipient victory of classical republicanism and early modern constitutional ideas (potentially anticipating the liberalism of a later age) over absolutism. It is equally sceptical about the idea of a monarchy successfully claiming absolute authority in both secular and spiritual matters and transforming the church into a mere instrument of political power. Rather, it is interested in how different and often conflicting ideas and representations of kingship interacted in France and England and across national boundaries, and in the internal mechanics of such interactions. It will concentrate on the discourses and practices which gave legitimacy to royal authority – sometimes, perhaps, to the neglect of those systems of argument that were critical of royal authority – but could gain a momentum of their own. They could spin out of control and impose considerable constraints on the exercise of royal authority, or even undermine it when the internal contradictions of sacral kingship or royalism became too flagrant.

In looking at competing representations and ideas of kingship, this study will concentrate in particular on the tensions between traditional notions of sacral kingship and the constraints a confessionalized world imposed on all rulers. It will address this problem by taking a perspective which is both comparative and transnational, in an attempt to write the history of the two monarchies under discussion here, those of France and England, as a true *histoire croisée*.[12] This perspective suggests itself because by comparison with other European crowns, these two monarchies shared a unique medieval legacy of sacerdotal kingship, a vision of monarchy in which the king was more than just a secular ruler; that is, a mere judge and warrior. In both England and France, the king was almost a priest who derived special sacral powers from having been anointed and crowned. These sacral powers included the capacity miraculously to heal those suffering from the King's Evil. This common medieval tradition was transformed by the Reformation in England but not destroyed. Marc Bloch long ago pursued the history of this particular notion of sacral kingship in France and England in his foundational work *Les rois thaumaturges*.[13]

Despite Bloch's pioneering comparative study, which, of course, concentrates mainly on the Middle Ages, it has often been assumed that English political culture in the early modern period was to some extent self-contained, or at least thoroughly exceptional.[14] Historians have often only paid lip service to the need to take account of the interaction between changes in political culture in England and the impact of foreign models of political authority.[15] Or, alternatively, they have taken a cardboard model of European absolutism – ideally Catholic or popish – and employed it to explain both Stuart policies in seventeenth-century England and the more or less violent reaction against them.[16] They have frequently been reluctant to take note of recent research which paints a much more nuanced and subtle picture of continental 'absolutism' – if, indeed, this somewhat problematic concept should be retained at all.[17]

Even when they have tried to establish a comparative perspective on the history of the French and English monarchies in the seventeenth century, conventional accounts have sometimes only stated the seemingly obvious. On the one hand, there was the emergence, in the end, of a political system in which monarchy had lost its sacral charisma and the monarch found it impossible to act without Parliament on major political issues. This monarchy maintained only a residual link with a vaguely defined post-doctrinal Protestant culture. On the other hand, there was Catholic absolutism and a sacerdotal monarchy, which left little room either for liberty of conscience or any open debate about royal policies, let alone the constitutional foundations of royal power. But as will become clear, matters are much more complicated. Bourbon kingship was and remained subject to considerable constraints in both religious and secular matters, although these constraints, especially the latter, were often more implicit than explicit. The Stuarts ultimately foundered in 1688, initially less on the rock of parliamentary privileges and constitutional liberty than on the internal contradictions of their own highly specific conception of sacral monarchy and its confessional implications.[18]

Such problems must be analysed from a European perspective, otherwise it is all too easy to fall back on the old Whig model of English national history which, from the outset, was entirely different from that of other European countries, or on that of a specific and unique English tradition of liberty always destined to triumph over the powers of darkness, betrayed only by the Scottish Stuarts and English papists. The history of the late Tudor and the Stuart monarchies between 1587 and 1688 can only be truly understood in a European context.[19] Not just theoretical arguments about political order, but also prevailing representations and images of kingship and government practices were embedded in an ongoing exchange of ideas and a constant encounter between different models of monarchy which competed against, but also complemented, each other. The same, however, is also true of France, although there, admittedly, it was often the Habsburg courts rather than England that provided the counterfoil to French visions of kingship. In fact, it has been argued that the impact of the Spanish model became more pronounced during the later decades of Louis XIV's reign.[20] Nevertheless, there were periods when English anti-popery had a very noticeable, although, of course, negative, impact on political debates in France. This was certainly the case in the aftermath of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, but to a lesser extent also during and after the Exclusion Crisis in England from 1678 onwards. The persecution of Catholics in England exacerbated religious tensions in France and fed the religious passions of those who thought that the firstborn son of the church had an absolute duty to persecute all heretics. Equally, the English regicide of 1649 reinforced tendencies in France to reject all models of government which saw royal power as part of a more broadly based framework of laws and privileges imposing explicit constraints on the king's power.

But England not only provided a counter model to a Catholic monarchy *iure divino* in France and convenient arguments for those who wanted to combat both Protestantism and constitutional ideas, which were seen as incompatible with the exceptional status and special dignity of the king of France. There were also times, in particular, near the end of the Wars of Religion and during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, when the Erastian church settlement in England, combined with comparatively strong episcopal authority within the church, did not seem completely dissimilar to the French Catholic Church's Gallican tradition. Rejecting papal claims to wield authority not just in ecclesiastical but also in secular matters was a high priority for James VI and I as well as for the judges of the Parisian *parlement* and many theologians of the Sorbonne.

In both England and France, ecclesiological controversies and debates about the relationship between church and state were impossible to separate from wider discussions about the nature of political authority as such throughout this period. In England, James I was to declare in 1604: 'No bishop – no king'.[21] Whatever the truth of this claim, theories of divine right kingship and divine right episcopacy were certainly born together in England and largely originated in the same intellectual circles.[22] The apparent harmony and close alliance between divine right monarchy and episcopacy *iure divino* before the outbreak of the Civil War was soon to be severely tested. It did not survive the regicide of 1649 and the compromises of the Restoration settlement unharmed. In fact, the relationship between secular – in particular, royal – authority on the one hand and ecclesiastical power and jurisdiction on the other was a controversial issue throughout most of the period under discussion here. At first glance the conflict between *sacerdotium* and *imperium* in the seventeenth century may seem to be no more than a rearguard action in a war which had taken place long ago, during the high and late Middle Ages, and had ended in the Reformation with the victory of *imperium* over *sacerdotium*. As will be shown, however, such an assumption would be misleading. The conflict between episcopal and royal claims to *iure divino* authority was one of the principal ingredients in the crisis which brought James II down in 1687–8, at about the same time as the Sun King was on the brink of being openly excommunicated by the Pope. 'The seventeenth century was still consumed by the struggle between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*', as Jeffrey Collins has recently stated.[23] It is essential to understand the implications of this struggle in order to put the idea of sacral monarchy into context and to assess its potential both for generating political legitimacy for rulers and for undermining royal authority if an individual monarch was found wanting when measured by its demanding standards. Far from being just an obsolete controversy relating to arcane points of theology and ecclesiastical law, the conflict about the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical power – so prominent in the work of Thomas Hobbes, one of the most important thinkers of the period[24] – remained an essential element in the debate about the nature of royal power. This debate had repercussions far beyond the end of the seventeenth century, in both England and France.

Because the authority of the church could still pose a challenge to royal power, the various manifestations of monarchy required a distinct kind of religious settlement and a church which not only had a specific structure, such as episcopal government, but also favoured a particular type of liturgy and piety. This is how it appeared not only to James VI and I when he endorsed episcopacy, but also to his son Charles I. But this was also true of France, where neither Calvinism, nor the specific brand of piety so typical of the adherents of the Catholic League of France, was really compatible with the traditional *religion royale*. For Calvinists this 'royal religion' competed with the obedience and veneration due to God and to God alone. Moreover, its strong emphasis on the power of ritual acts and the visual image of majesty was at least potentially at odds with the particular religious sensibilities of Calvinist Protestants, although the rejection of the Mass and other traditional medieval religious acts of worship did not extend to civic rituals.[25] But it would have been more difficult for them than for Catholics to approve of the virtual deification of the monarch by court artists and poets during the reign of Louis XIV. This could all too easily be seen as idolatry.[26]

Yet devout Catholicism was not always an easy ally for the French monarchy either. It had a strong tendency to measure an individual king by the standards of a religious rigorism inimical to political and moral compromises. A strong allegiance to monarchy could thus be combined with a tendency to find an individual king wanting by comparison with the ideal of truly saintly kingship. This trend was to some extent submerged in the seventeenth century, but became an important political factor again after 1715, when Louis XIV died.[27]

Thus in both England and France from the late sixteenth century onwards there was a monarchy in search of a church whose structure, faith and practices of piety were compatible with a divinely sanctioned royal authority. But this monarchy also came under repeated pressure to demonstrate its religious orthodoxy and saw itself besieged by religious zealots of various hues, although in the late seventeenth century this phenomenon was less pronounced in France than in the Stuart kingdoms.

Matters had been different in France one hundred years earlier. In fact, the English poet John Dryden exclaimed in the 1680s: '1684 and 1584 have but a century between them to be the same.'[28] That was his judgement in his translation of the French ex-Jesuit Louis de Maimbourg's *History of the League*. It is difficult to overlook the parallels between the crisis of the late Stuart monarchy in the decade preceding the Glorious Revolution and the crisis of the French monarchy in the 1580s and 1590s. With the death of the Duke of Anjou in 1584, Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre, became the heir apparent to the last Valois, Henry III. French Catholics thus faced the danger of being governed by a Protestant king. Almost one hundred years later, in the late 1670s, the facts that Charles II had no legitimate children and that his brother and likely successor, the Duke of York, had converted to Catholicism were perceived as a threat by many English Protestants. They tried to exclude the Duke of York from the succession in order to replace him with a reliable Protestant. There is an obvious parallel here with the League's political programme in France between 1584 and 1593–4. This rejected Henry of Navarre as heir to the crown and stipulated that according to the fundamental laws of France, only a Catholic could become king. In the end, Henry converted to Catholicism and was crowned king in Chartres, whereas James II remained a Catholic, lost his crown and took refuge in France, where he spent his last years trying to live up to the model of sacral, priestly kingship to which he subscribed. For Dryden, however, writing in 1684, Henry IV of France was an example the Stuarts could and should follow one century later, not so much because of the king of Navarre's conversion – in fact, Dryden studiously ignored this change of religious allegiance – but because he had managed to overcome the religious fanaticism of the League and the Catholic monarchomachs. In Dryden's opinion, their successors were the English and Scottish Whigs of the later seventeenth century.[29]

Dryden's emphasis on the parallels between late sixteenth century France and Stuart England was, in many ways, an act of political propaganda. It was an attempt to tar his Whig opponents with the brush of religious, particularly popish, radicalism. In Dryden's opinion the ideas of those who thought that subjects had the right of resistance against a ruler who suppressed the true church were anchored in the thought of infamous Catholic writers who had advocated the murder of princes during the French and European Wars of Religion. In many ways this was sheer polemic, although Catholic and Protestant critics of monarchical authority shared a common heritage and did not hesitate, at times, to borrow ideas from each other, however much they detested the theological doctrines of the opposing side. One might therefore dismiss Dryden's entire analysis as superficial or spurious. But the histories of the French and English monarchies were, undoubtedly, intimately linked with each other during the period under discussion here. At various stages, both underwent a series of crises at least in part caused by tension between the notion of sacral kingship and a political reality that forced the ruler to make concessions to *Realpolitik* or to tolerate religious dissenters.

In comparing the history of kingship in France and England and examining how a common heritage of sacral kingship was transformed in different ways in the two countries, this book will focus on three key turning points in the period under discussion here – that is, from the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 to the defeat of James II during the Glorious Revolution in 1688. Both events exemplify the encounters and interactions between the two countries in a paradigmatic way, as the fate of Mary Queen of Scots was as much part of French as of Scottish and English history. After all, Mary was the widow of a king of France and, through her mother, closely related to the House of Guise, which provided the Catholic League with its leaders. Equally, James II lost his crown not least because he was perceived in England and Scotland as being too much of a client of Catholic France. And it was in France that he took refuge after failing to regain his crown in Ireland with the help of French troops in 1689–90.

In concentrating on three key periods of French and English history, this book aims both to establish a basis for a comparison between the two countries and to gain a better understanding of how the political cultures in the two kingdoms interacted. The first period under discussion here, the decades between the death of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI and I's reaction to the meeting of the French Estates General in 1614, was a time when both monarchies were faced by the threat of radical religious opposition, before 1600 the French monarchy probably more than the English one. But even in England there were enough men (and perhaps some women as well) who thought that it might be a laudable and pious deed to kill a queen or king who was a heretic. Two French kings were assassinated during this period, and the threat of being murdered by a Catholic assassin was a very real one in England for both Elizabeth I and James I, at least until 1605, the year of the Gunpowder Plot. In both England and France the monarchy had to reinvent itself to meet the challenge of religious radicalism and, in doing so, monarchs faced the problem of readjusting the relationship between secular and spiritual authority.[30] The debate about the French succession after 1584, for example, was very much about the limits that could be imposed on the jurisdiction of the church in secular matters, or in what royalists saw as secular matters. The French debate had a deep impact in England, where the French Wars of Religion changed perceptions of the relationship between subjects and ruler in other ways as well. The radicalism of the Catholic League was to discredit more outspoken theories of resistance for a long time to come in England. And as Dryden's remarks show, the memory of the Civil War could still provide advocates of divine right monarchy with strong arguments one hundred years later.

However, if monarchy had to reinvent itself in both France and England at the end of the sixteenth century, this reinvention was not limited to the realm of political theory. Much more was involved than just an attempt to construct a new system of theological, legal and philosophical arguments which could give legitimacy to royal authority. At stake was a change of much greater scope: a new style of kingship which redefined its sacral charisma and the role of the ruler as both *rex* and *sacerdos*. This was of crucial importance both in France, with its ancient *religion royale*, and in England, where the monarch acted as supreme governor – and head – of the church. The dominant representations of kingship and the self-fashioning of monarchs both changed considerably over this period. This is a subject which this book will not be able to discuss in detail, but it is one of the essential assumptions of this study that ritual, ceremony and images of power can only be understood adequately if they are seen in the context of political and, even more importantly, theological debates.[31] Many of the great rituals of state, such as the coronation, were in themselves ecclesiastical ceremonies, but even the perception of more secular performances of power by contemporaries was necessarily informed by their religious attitudes and convictions. Thus Calvinism's frontal attack on the Mass and traditional religious ceremonies also had an impact on secular rituals and symbolic acts. If the celebration of the Eucharist was no longer a performative ritual that could, in a meaningful way, change reality or create a reality of its own, this could undermine the perceived effectiveness of secular ceremonies and forms of symbolic representation as well. From a wider perspective, the tendency of reformed Protestantism to question all ceremonies as mere outward signs of a faith that was not necessarily sincerely held, while privileging personal religious conviction based on a personal experience of God as the real sign of divine grace, also had a deep impact on political culture and social institutions.[32] Milton's attack on Charles I's self-presentation as a martyr, seeing it as mere play-acting which 'an image doting rabble' might adore but was essentially blasphemous, is not easy to imagine outside a specifically Protestant context.[33] This holds true although there were forms of Catholicism in the seventeenth century, such as Jansenism, that also placed great emphasis on the individual experience of faith as opposed to mere acceptance of the outward forms of worship and piety.

In different ways both Catholic and Protestant rulers were under pressure in the period under discussion here to create religious identities for themselves consistent with the assumption that the faith of each believer had its foundation in the authentic and permanent core of his or her individual personality, his or her 'real' self.[34] By and large, however, this redefinition of what constituted the sacrality of monarchy, or what made it credible and persuasive, affected Protestant monarchies more deeply than Catholic ones. Overall, the change in religious sensibilities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could lead to a disenchantment of monarchy unless the ruler succeeded in compensating for this comparative loss of the sacrality which secular and ecclesiastical rituals traditionally bestowed on him, in particular, by presenting himself as the chosen instrument of providence. A true re-enchantment of royal authority could thus take place by an appeal to providence, and especially in Protestant countries, this process continued to be of central importance until well into the eighteenth century.[35]

In the second period under discussion here, roughly covering the 1630s and 1640s, the development of monarchy in England and France diverged much more radically than in the preceding decades. In England, Charles I was executed in 1649 in the name of a higher legal order but also of godliness and righteousness as the radical parliamentarians understood these ideals, whereas the French monarchy withstood the onslaught of the Fronde in the late 1640s much better. Soon, after almost eighty years of internal conflicts and turmoil, it was on its way to a lasting recovery whose apogee came during the personal rule of Louis XIV after 1660. Whatever the Fronde was, it was not a religious revolt, although the tensions between the king's first ministers and the religious rigorists, the *dévots* and later the early Jansenists, had been palpable enough in France before 1648. In fact, certain parallels between the Puritan movement within the Church of England and the *dévots* in France become visible on closer examination, although the French rigorists lacked the eschatological outlook which was such an important ingredient in Puritanism. Beyond such parallels, the turmoil of the Civil War strengthened the Stuarts' tie with the Continent which, in the 1650s, offered a refuge to the exiled Charles II, and more particularly with France, as Charles's mother, Henrietta Maria, was French. During the Civil War her court had become a focus for those royalists who came to suspect Protestantism as such, and not just radical Calvinism, of being at odds with divine right monarchy.[36] After the Restoration, the creation of closer links not just with France but also with French Catholicism remained an important political and religious option, not to say temptation, for the Stuarts. On the other hand, the English regicides helped to discredit all attempts in France to define the authority of the monarch in ways that appealed less to an indefeasible divine right than to notions of constitutionalism, not to say monarchical republicanism. This tradition, always much weaker in France, had already been fatally undermined at the end of the Wars of Religion when it had become almost inconceivable to separate the king's mystical body from his natural body. It was finally killed off by the spectacle of a group of radically Protestant revolutionaries putting their own king on trial and having him executed. Even the French Huguenots were forced to condemn the English republicans, despite the reservations they may have had regarding an authoritarian Catholic monarchy.

In 1660 the English monarchy was restored. From the outset it was overshadowed by the splendour and power of its French counterpart. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries it had by no means been clear that the monarchy in England was necessarily less stable than in France. In fact, between *c.*1560 and *c.*1630 the opposite had often been true, and to the extent that an exchange of ideas or any real interaction between the political cultures of the two kingdoms had taken place, it had often been evenly balanced. This was much less the case in the later seventeenth century, in particular during the period 1678 to 1688, which will be discussed in the last section of this book. At times England seemed to risk becoming a mere client of the French crown, while French 'absolutism', combined with a particular French variety of religious intolerance, became the great *bête noire* for all those in England who feared that Protestantism and English liberties would be undermined by the restored monarchy. It is clear that neither English politics nor the fate of the monarchy in this period can be understood without constant reference to the wider European context in which the Stuarts as a dynasty as well as their opponents moved – in particular, without reference to France. This served both as a model for royal government and as a bugbear which could be used to attack Charles II and his Catholic successor.

The religious aspects of Louis XIV's policies were of particular importance in this respect. This applies both to his persecution of the Huguenots and his attempts to reduce to a mere shadow the Pope's remaining control over the French church. This led to a severe conflict with the papacy in the 1680s. French Gallicanism in its conciliarist form, less so in its royalist one, could certainly offer a model to those English bishops whose ideal was a close alliance between a *iure divino* monarchy and the corporate authority of a church governed by an episcopal hierarchy *iure divino*, but who did not hesitate to offer resistance to a monarch who did not respect this corporate authority.

In the early eighteenth century, a revived and transformed Jansenist movement became the heir of older Gallican and conciliarist traditions in France itself. Jansenist ecclesiastical constitutionalism posed as much of a challenge to the prevailing model of kingship in France during this period as the incipient critique of an aggressively secular Enlightenment.[37] In England on the other hand, anti-clericalism, which itself often had strong roots in the Reformation, and the attack on a church which controversially asserted its authority and status as a self-governing, divinely ordained corporation, made as important a contribution to the transformation of political culture in the early eighteenth century as a republicanism inspired by the history of Rome and Greece and the ideals of humanism. The new civil religion which this Whig anti-clericalism fostered should not be confused with secularism in the narrow sense of the word.[38] Nor was it necessarily opposed to monarchy as such, because only a strong state could really control the church. Mark Goldie has reminded us that 'Erastianism became a permanent counterbalance within Whiggism to the country ideal of distrust of the state. It helps explain the readiness of post-revolution Whiggism to sanctify and defend state power, and so explains the longevity in England of the idea of a national church.'[39]

Older debates on the relationship between *sacerdotium* and *imperium* thus continued to have a considerable impact on political ideas and on the prevailing models of kingship beyond the period under discussion here in both England and France. In both countries political culture continued to bear the imprint of the religious conflicts and antagonisms of the past: in one case the Henrician Reformation and the long struggle over the religious identity and government of the Church of England in the seventeenth century; and in the other the founding moment of the Bourbon dynasty amidst the turmoil of a religious war at the end of the sixteenth century.

This study, however, ends with the Glorious Revolution and the refashioning of the baroque monarchy in France in the 1680s. Throughout this period – in France in the 1590s as much as in England in 1649 and the period after 1688, which lies just beyond the scope of this book – kingship, despite the often serious challenge posed by religious zealots, domestic rebellion and, in England, republican ideas, retained the capacity to reinvent itself even in moments of crisis. It continued to create new and revive old symbols, representations and intellectual arguments which could serve as a source of cultural and symbolic capital. Even after a severe crisis, royal power and kingship as an institution could be re-enchanted. Among these sources of symbolic and cultural capital, religion, whatever its specific forms, remained one of the most important. The 'prose of bureaucracy' may have become more dominant in the late seventeenth century, but kings who were astute or charismatic enough, such as Louis XIV and William III of England, had not yet lost the capacity to articulate their claims to authority, status and glory in language which owed more to the 'the poetry of princes' than to the prose of lawyers and administrative experts. The appeal to religious images and values could still lend their power legitimacy by emphasizing the sacral aura or providential role which church and religion conferred on them, even though older images and symbols of authority and its sacral dimension had lost some of their potency and persuasiveness by the end of the seventeenth century.

I

THE ANGLO-GALLICAN MOMENT

The French and English Monarchies from the Death of Mary Queen of Scots to James I's *Remonstrance for the Right of Kings* 1587–1615

Introduction

In the late sixteenth century the European political landscape was deeply transformed by religious divisions between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant churches. Monarchs who had traditionally relied on religion to give their authority legitimacy could easily find themselves in a treacherous no man's land between competing religious groups and movements. The French monarchy was especially strongly affected by this religious upheaval. It not only threatened to undermine the *religion royale*, the royal religion, which so far had formed the basis for the king's status as a sacral ruler, but also called into question the rules of inheritance determining the succession to the crown. At various times, redefining the French monarchy in terms of an elective kingship was a real option for radical Protestants, and even more so for radical Catholics.

In France the religious conflict since the 1560s had posed a twofold challenge to the monarchy. First there were the Calvinists, for whom God was so radically transcendent that the sacramental character of Holy Communion was reduced to a merely symbolic dimension. But if the ceremonies of the church were deflated in importance, if not rejected outright, how could the ceremonies of the *religion royale*, the great rituals of state such as the *sacre* (the anointing and coronation of the king), state funerals or even the more secular *lit de justice* (a solemn session of the *parlement* in Paris in the presence of the king) retain their power as ritual performances? These implications of Calvinist theology to some extent explain why Francis I and his successors from the start rejected the option of an alliance with Calvinism.[1]

Notes for this chapter begin on page 171.

Secondly, the political theology of the radical Catholics organized in the French Catholic League posed perhaps an even greater threat to the monarchy. While Calvinism tended to disenchant kingship and destroy, or at least diminish, the ruler's aura of sacredness, radical Catholics subscribed to a vision of politics and the church which, as Denis Crouzet has argued, was linked to an over-enchantment of the world.[2] For religious zealots of all types the divine was immediately present in this world, in the here and now. Catholics, for example, saw it in the sacrifice of the Mass,[3] but also in the words and deeds of men who were directly inspired by God, such as the prophets and heroes of the Old Testament. Somebody who claimed this sort of inspiration could well feel entitled to kill a tyrant single handed, as Jacques Clément had done in 1589 when he assassinated Henry III.[4] This was an extremely dangerous vision of the role that religion could and should play in politics. Although for radical Catholics, as opposed to Calvinists, the religious character of the royal *sacre* and the coronation were not in doubt, they pointedly asked whether such rituals were effective when the anointed ruler was a heretic? In the eyes of most supporters of the League this was clearly not the case. In fact, as Dale van Kley has pointed out, the political theology of the League could be seen as a sort of Donatism; that is, as a religious movement which, like the heretical sect of this name in late antiquity, insisted that a ritual act was only valid if the persons performing it were not tainted by moral or spiritual deficiencies.[5] The League ultimately subscribed to a theocratic vision of politics that left little room for an independent secular authority. In this sense there are, *mutatis mutandis*, clear parallels between the model of politics espoused by the League in France and the political ideals of the radical Presbyterians in Scotland.[6] In both cases, the king was a ruler under the constant supervision of the church.

Compared with the last two Valois kings in France, Elizabeth I's position in late sixteenth-century England was much less contested, despite the threat of radical Catholicism. The Tudors – at least in England, although less so in Ireland – were more successful than Charles IX and Henry III of France in containing the religious divisions inevitably present in any discussion of domestic or foreign policy. Elizabeth I even managed to integrate militant Protestantism into a framework of representations and doctrines giving her a unique status as a godly ruler and heroic defender of the English reformation against Rome and Spain, without ever really fully subscribing to the political vision which such ideas and images of authority were meant to sustain.[7] As supreme governor of a national church which defined itself as Protestant while never, to the chagrin of its Puritan members, entirely rejecting the pre-Reformation traditions of piety, ecclesiastical discipline and administration, she combined strong Erastian convictions with a great reluctance to support any further and more radical reformation of the Church of England.[8] From the point of view of many of the hotter sort of Protestants, including some of her own councillors and many members of both Houses of Parliament, her attempts to fight popery and its agents in England were much too cautious. There were undoubtedly moments when, like Henry III of France in the 1580s, she risked being criticized by religious radicals as a ruler who had betrayed the sacred mission with which God himself entrusted every prince.[9] But Elizabeth was much better than Henry III at making the necessary concessions to the radicals – for example, by having Mary Queen of Scots executed, however reluctantly – without ever committing herself to their vision of an eschatological struggle against the powers of darkness.

The French monarchy clearly underwent a deep crisis in the 1580s, whereas Elizabeth I was seemingly able to overcome all challenges to her authority. The apparent stability of the Tudor monarchy, however, was more precarious than it seemed. The succession crisis produced by the fact that Elizabeth, like Henry III, was childless – a clear parallel between the two rulers – could only be resolved by a highly controversial act of regicide, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's main rival in 1587. In the years preceding this dramatic event, leading members of the Protestant elite governing the country had devised a scenario which would allow them to deny Mary's claims to the crown even if Elizabeth were to predecease her.[10] In redefining the kingdom as a monarchical republic and, at least implicitly, rejecting the claims to the succession of any pretender who was not a Protestant, Elizabeth's councillors not only anticipated the Exclusion Crisis of the late 1670s and early 1680s, but also developed a model of kingship (or queenship) as potentially elective and subordinate to the value system of religious orthodoxy.[11] This 'monarchical republic' presented a Protestant counterpart to the vision of monarchy that theologians and lawyers writing for the Holy League in France constructed in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Unlike France, England (but not the Tudor monarchy as a whole, if Ireland is also considered) was spared the turmoil of civil war and armed religious conflict in the late sixteenth century. It was deeply affected, however, by the repercussions of the European wars of religion during these decades, not only the Revolt of the Netherlands, in which Elizabeth I, however reluctantly, became ever more directly embroiled, but also the French Wars of Religion.

In fact, at no time since the mid fifteenth century (when the Hundred Years' War came to an end) had the histories of the French and the English monarchies been so entangled. At no time since then was interaction between events and debates in France and England so pronounced as during the period under the discussion here, between the late 1580s and the 1620s. In the late 1950s, J. H. M. Salmon pointed out that English political thought after about 1590 was deeply influenced by the writings of French royalist authors who tried to refute the radical demands of the League by creating a new model of divine right kingship immune to any challenges to its authority, whether rooted in a religious right of resistance or otherwise justified.[12] From the 1590s on, the idea that rulers who turned against the one true church, however defined, or who violated their subjects' liberties and privileges could be called to account by any human authority and possibly even deposed as tyrants was seen as a hallmark of popery and the most aggressive, Jesuitical variant of Roman Catholicism.[13] The notion that Protestants could openly espouse such ideas, especially with regard to their own king and country, was almost inconceivable between *c.*1590 and 1640. This rejection of older conceptions of a right of resistance rooted in natural law, ancient constitutional rights and the freedom of the true church clearly reveals the influence of the ongoing debates in France. There not only the moderate *catholiques d'État* but also the Huguenots[14] had decidedly turned against such notions in favour of stronger royal authority after 1584, although the Huguenots may have retained some misgivings about the unfettered authority of a Catholic ruler.[15]

Interaction between the crisis of the late Valois monarchy and the redefinition of French kingship by Henry IV on the one hand, and the repositioning of the monarchy within a changing political culture in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries on the other was not limited to the intellectual level, to the history of ideas, important as this aspect may be. Rather, we can speak of a true *histoire croisée* of the two countries in this period and beyond.[16] At the level of mere dynastic politics, Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I's main rival, was not just a queen of Scotland in exile but also the widow of a king of France and, even more importantly, through her mother, a member of the Guise dynasty, which had assumed the leadership of radical Catholicism in France.[17] Her execution in 1587 was of considerable importance in undermining the rule of Henry III, who was perceived by the Guises themselves and their radical followers as a deeply ambivalent figure. In their eyes he had failed to distance himself from those who had killed the Scottish queen and their allies in France.[18] But events in England also contributed in other ways to the growing political crisis of the years 1587 to 1589 in France, culminating in the murder of the king by Jacques Clément in August 1589. Spain was determined to subdue England in 1588 and therefore tried to ensure that France remained at least neutral if it could not be persuaded to support the Armada sent against Elizabeth I. Spanish support for the radical League in Paris, and in France in general, was therefore especially strong in 1588.[19]

As far as England was concerned, however, a League victory in France would have had catastrophic consequences for the Tudor monarchy as the League and its leaders were closely allied with Spain, England's principal enemy. England's subsequent military intervention in France, before Henry IV converted to Protestantism, was not a great success, but it set a pattern for further military campaigns in the late 1620s. These were intended to ensure the survival of French Protestantism as a political force, although they dismally failed to achieve their objective.[20]

More important than these aspects of dynastic and foreign policy, however, were the religious and confessional elements of political conflict during this period. They created a cluster of connections and a series of protracted interactions between French and English history at this time. The different and competing currents of Catholicism in England and France, for example, were closely linked to each other. Quite a number of English (and Scottish) Catholics lived in exile in France or the nearby Spanish Netherlands. They often, but not invariably, sided with the League, finding a rich arsenal for their own political theories in Leaguer thought. Undoubtedly, however, the experience of persecution which their English fellow Catholics had to face also made a major contribution to the process of political and religious radicalization among adherents of the League in France. Would not French Catholics under the rule of a Protestant French king undergo the same persecution that English Catholics were already suffering? And had not Elizabeth I been crowned by Catholic bishops as a Catholic queen, but nevertheless turned out to be an enemy of the true church? This, at least, was the danger evoked by a number of influential pamphlets in France in the late 1580s and early 1590s.[21]

On the other hand, the resurgence of Gallicanism as an ecclesiastical and theological movement during the last phase of the Wars of Religion, with its strong emphasis on the autonomy of national churches, its reluctance to accept the decrees and reforms enacted by the Council of Trent as binding and its rejection of papal claims to exercise supreme authority not just in spiritual matters but secular ones as well,[22] had a strong impact on moderate Catholics in England. These were looking for theological arguments to justify their quest for a pragmatic *modus vivendi* with the Protestant state and to lend plausibility to their claims to be loyal subjects of the crown. These moderate Catholics were, as a rule, opponents of the Jesuits and acted as mediators between the debates in France and England.[23] Prominent among them was, for example, William Bishop (1553–1624), who had studied at the Sorbonne and obtained a doctorate there. Almost at the end of his life, he was to become the first Vicar Apostolic for England. In the 1590s he took up the cause of the secular Catholic clergy in England against the regulars; that is, the Jesuits and other priests in religious orders. He and other secular clergy appealed to Rome against the appointment of an archpriest for England, trying to enlist French support for their struggle. Later, in 1603, he drew up a 'Protestation of Allegiance to Queen Elizabeth', rejecting all forms of open political resistance to her government.[24] Another member of this group was William Watson, a Catholic priest who translated anti-Jesuitical tracts by Gallican and *politique* writers such as Etienne Pasquier into English, and tried to prove that Puritans and Jesuits shared similar subversive ideas regarding secular authority. Disappointed by James I's failure to grant full toleration after his accession, Watson later got involved in the Bye Plot to overthrow James and was executed as a traitor in 1603. But his attempt to show the potential merits of Catholic loyalism may, nevertheless, have been genuine enough.[25]

However, if Gallicanism seemed to present some sort of *via media* between a papalism *à outrance* and a total denial of any sort of papal supremacy, it could also provide a model for the Church of England itself, or for those within it who rejected Puritanism and its call for a further reformation. These people tried to justify the many compromises on which the Elizabethan church settlement was based as the epitome of moderation rather than as pragmatic ad hoc solutions to problems which, at heart, remained intractable.[26] It is certainly true that at a strictly theological level, the distance between Canterbury and the Sorbonne – if the theological faculty of the University of Paris is seen as the real centre of the French church – was unbridgeable.[27] In matters of ecclesiastical policy and jurisdiction, however, this was not necessarily the case. To those theologians and bishops of the Church of England who came to see Rome's main error less in the Catholic church's teachings on subjects such as the Mass and the doctrine of grace than in the Pope's claim to almost unlimited jurisdictional authority within the church – to the detriment both of secular rulers and bishops – the Gallican variety of Catholicism could seem quite an attractive model.[28]

During the reign of Henry IV a number of 'elective affinities' did, in fact, emerge between the Church of England – or, at least, the sort of church the anti-Calvinist conformists among the ministers and bishops envisaged – and the French Catholic church. One example was the emphasis on episcopal, as opposed to papal, authority. In the 1620s and 1630s some Anglican theologians were even to dream of a future compromise between Catholics and Protestants based on theological moderation and the rejection of Tridentine papalism, leading eventually to a reunion of Christendom. However unrealistic, this was, it seems, the view that James I had anticipated when he became king of England in 1603.[29]

Any hopes of a genuine ecumenical *via media* soon proved to be unfounded. Even those French Catholics who were most virulently opposed to any sort of political or ecclesiastical papalism did not, as a rule, have much sympathy for the Protestant Church of England.[30] England, however, might provide an example that could be emulated in a different way. After 1603 James I deliberately tried to distinguish between religious allegiance and political loyalty when dealing with religious dissent and recusancy. In his view, even Catholics could claim to be loyal subjects of the crown as long as they rejected all papal claims to exercise supreme political authority, whether directly or indirectly. Aspirations to, or support for, a clerical theocracy, whether Catholic or Presbyterian, were incompatible with political loyalty. But this did not apply to mere religious convictions, held in private, which diverged from the official doctrines of the Church of England. This redefinition of political loyalty in more secular terms could well serve as a model for France, where neither Protestants nor the intellectual and political heirs of the League were easy to integrate into a state which, for the time being, had little chance of becoming truly homogenous in religious terms. In fact, it did provide a model in the years after the assassination of Henry IV.[31] During the discussions of the Estates General in 1614, the English Oath of Allegiance of 1606 provided a blueprint for the declaration of loyalty that the third estate wanted to impose in France (see below, pp. 53–6).

In sum, in both England and France ecclesiological controversies and debates about the relationship between church and state were impossible to separate from wider discussions about the nature of political order. In France this became especially apparent during the succession crisis of the late 1580s and early 1590s, when a Protestant, Henry of Navarre, had the best claim to become the successor of the childless last Valois, Henry III.

The French Monarchy in Crisis 1587–1594

In 1589 Jean Boucher, one of the most prominent clerical leaders of the Parisian League in France, published his famous tract *De iusta Henrici tertii abdicatione*. Presumably written in the months preceding the violent death of the last Valois, it was a straightforward justification of the regicide. In it Boucher wrote trenchantly: 'Omnino rex nemo nascitur – nobody is born a king'.[32] In making this statement Boucher wanted to emphasize that ultimately all royal power was dependent on popular sovereignty. Unlike popes and bishops, kings were of the people's making, not of God's, however much God might approve of monarchy as a form of government. And even that was somewhat doubtful in Boucher's writings.[33] He continued: 'Nowhere is the principle of hereditary succession so firmly established that thereby the right of the people to constitute kings is denied and abrogated.'[34] Even hereditary rulers did not properly become kings before they were crowned, and a rightful coronation was ultimately impossible without the people's assent. Boucher argued that rulers were therefore responsible for what they did or left undone and, if necessary, could be called to account by their own subjects. This principle could be applied to Henry III, widely seen by strict Catholics as a tyrant since the murder of the Guise brothers in Blois in December 1588, as much as to his potential successor, the king of Navarre. His claim to be the new king of France could only be rejected if the office and title of king were less than hereditary, if not, in fact, elective. The Huguenots had employed similar arguments during the earlier stages of the Wars of Religion to justify their resistance to the crown. But after 1584, when Henry of Navarre became the heir apparent, they had largely abandoned this line of argument, or at least carefully concealed it behind protestations of loyalty to the hereditary monarch.

At least implicitly, however, such arguments had also played a part in attempts by Elizabeth I's Protestant councillors to ensure that Mary Stuart would not succeed her Tudor cousin. In England, admittedly, it was extremely difficult to assess the various pretenders' claims to the crown.[35] Under Henry VIII, Parliament had passed several mutually contradictory statutes, which were intended to settle