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THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY:  
DEPOSITION OF KINGS AND THEOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONALISM  
DURING THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION  
(Summary)

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The French Wars of Religion posed the greatest challenge to the French monarchy since the end of the Hundred Years War: while both factions, Huguenots and ultra-Catholics, started the conflict by professing total allegiance to the Valois dynasty, in an obvious attempt to draw the Crown on their side, they both slid, under the pressure of events, towards a more anti-royalist stance, embracing a religious populism which envisioned significant limitations on the power of the king. Especially after 1585, the radical Catholic League, firmly determined to prevent the succession of Henry de Navarre, started to act against Henry III, first covertly, through plots and conspiracies, then in the open, through armed revolt – and kept up the struggle after Henry III's death, until Henry IV's final victory, between 1594 and 1598. This war was accompanied by an intense campaign of propaganda without precedent until then in French history – a campaign that vilified both Henry III and Henry IV –, through which the League made known its own vision for the government of France: a limited monarchy where the people had a decisive say and where both they and the pope could depose an unworthy king. This paper aims to examine the main arguments and goals of this campaign and their impact on French public opinion, in light of the League's ultimate political failure.

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