



## THINKER IN BOXES

# JACQUES-BENIGNE BOSSUET

*Team:* French Monarchists

*Position:* Long leg

*Status:* Died of the stones

Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704) is considered to be one of the best orators of all time. I'm not exactly certain what an orator is, but I'm pretty sure it has nothing to do with rowing a boat. He tutored the French dauphin (which is not an aquatic mammal) for King Louis XIV, was a favorite of the French aristocracy, and did some other things as well. He is perhaps most famous for his arguments regarding divine right and how that translated into the absolute authority of a monarch. The logic of absolutism was quite simple. Kings were divinely appointed. Therefore, they and their governments received their mandate from God and were answerable only to God. As a result, no man or collection of men had the right to question a king's authority.

Largely as a result of his involvement in the court of Louis XIV, Bossuet was intensely engaged in the grand politics of one of the most tumultuous eras in European history, and it would be fair to say that he was caught between a rock; a hard place; and another hard place in the form of the king of France, the church in Rome, and the Protestant churches. First, Bossuet was placed in a less than comfortable position in a violent dispute between Louis XIV and the church in Rome. Second, his commitment to reuniting the Protestant and Catholic churches by bringing the Protestants back into the Catholic Church endeared him to neither side and put him squarely in the middle of that conflict. The Protestants wanted nothing to do with someone trying to bring them back under the authority of Rome, and the hard-line Catholics railed at the moderate tone of his writings and their appeal to Protestant tastes. In both of these political and religious controversies, Bossuet argued for and pursued moderation and compromise, and that is a curious contrast to the immoderate and uncompromising logic and tenor of his argument for the divine and unquestionable authority of kings.

Finally, in one of the more unusual epitaphs of the dead theorists mentioned in this book, his death is attributed to “the stones.” I was about to blame Mick Jagger, but then I noticed that *stones* wasn't capitalized and did some actual looking into things. If you can trust historians and all their history, the stones appears to be chronic kidney stones that caused a rapid decline in his health and his eventual death.