

Concepts of Political Obedience in Late Tudor England: Conflicting Perspectives

RICHARD L. GREAVES

Primarily because of the Reformation, political obedience became an increasingly significant issue in Tudor England. The success of Henry VIII's break with Rome resulted partly because the state could use the established church to inculcate in the populace the notion of loyalty to the civil government as a Christian duty. Despite the vacillations of Henrician ecclesiastical policy and the more radical reforming spirit of the Edwardian years, Protestant views on political obedience remained fundamentally stable. The accession of Mary, however, created a critical dilemma for men who had been stressing the duty of obedience to one's ruler. Exile was only a partial solution, though among the exiles a handful of leaders worked out a theory of tyrannicide. Of those who took this course, John Knox in particular confused the issue by simultaneously raising the thorny problem of gynecocracy. Written while Mary Tudor was queen, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* appeared after Elizabeth's accession, when it was an embarrassment to Protestants. It was left, then, to the Elizabethans to rethink the entire question of political obedience.

In the Elizabethan era there was a striking reversal of political theory with respect to the concept of active resistance. Protestant writers retreated from the radical new theory of tyrannicide and returned to the more quiescent position worked out in the early Tudor period. Neither the Calvinist doctrine of the right of lesser magistrates to overthrow tyranny and idolatry nor the assertion of this right by the common people (as espoused by Knox, John Ponet, and Christopher Goodman) was openly advocated by English Protestants, though it is possible that some of them found the Calvinist position acceptable. For their part, the English Catholics who accepted the validity of active resistance did not look for their inspiration to the Marian exiles but reflected a medieval tradition that included such theorists as Manegold of Lautenbach, John of Salisbury, William of Ockham, Marsilius of Padua, and Jean Gerson.¹

¹ For a synopsis of their views, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, (Cambridge, 1978), 1:61-65; 2:126-29; Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp. 145-48; Ewart Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas* (London, 1954), 1:194, 248-49, 270; Charles C. Bayley, "Pivotal Concepts in the Political Philosophy of William of Ockham," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 10 (1949): 199-218; Alan Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua: The Defender of Peace* (New York, 1951), pp. 236-48; Zofia Rieger, "Gerson, the Conciliar Movement and the Right of Resistance," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25 (1964): 472-73, 477-78, 486.

Both the Catholic and the Calvinist theories of resistance were reflected in Elizabethan scriptural marginalia. The notes to the Rheims New Testament and later the Douai Bible (1609-10) on the one hand, and the Geneva Bible on the other, agree in many points on the importance of political obedience, even to cruel and pagan sovereigns. But the Geneva marginalia, unlike the political teaching of a broad range of Elizabethan Protestants, kept the Calvinist notion of legitimate resistance by lesser magistrates alive, even as Ponet, Goodman, and Knox were repudiated or ignored. Meanwhile, the Rheims New Testament and then the Douai Bible, with their unmistakable emphasis on the ultimate dutifulness of the Christian to ecclesiastical authority, angered Protestants by providing a religious justification for the overthrow of Protestant rulers.

The first Englishman to utilize the possibilities inherent in published scriptural annotations to espouse political obedience was the Lutheran William Tyndale. As early as 1534, he asserted in his prologue to Romans that temporal power is ordained to further the commonwealth, maintain peace, punish the evil, and defend the good. The temporal sword must therefore be honored. While God is to be obeyed rather than man, one can only suffer under a wicked sovereign, even if the power to resist is at hand. One who actively defies the government is "dampned in thy conscience yf thou dydest yt, because it is agaynst godes commaundement."² This last warning was repeated in the Matthew Bibles of 1537 and 1549.³ Although the Coverdale Bible of 1535 was largely content with the simple admonition to obey temporal rulers, the 1537 Matthew Bible underscored the divine origin of secular offices and called for obedience, even when the authorities are infidels, so long as they command nothing against God.⁴ The Great Bible of 1539 contained a gloss which specifically insisted that Christians "obeye Ungodly rulers."⁵

The early marginal statements on political subservience allowed only the right to refuse to obey unjust commands, and to suffer the consequences. The Tyndale-Coverdale New Testament of 1538 ruled out anything more than the spiritual sword; under the Gospel one must bear the cross of persecution, even to the point of death. A minister was given the option of exile only if the secular powers restricted persecution to the clergy, "but yf that flyenge awaye were the destruccyon of the flocke / and we with oure abydyng myght wythstande the same by the worde of God / doutles we ought to geue oure lyues for the brethren."⁶ Patiently suffer; take up no arms in resistance; obey God rather than men.⁷

² Tyndale New Testament (1534), note to Rom. 13; also see the prologues to Romans and Titus, and the notes to Acts 4 and Titus 3; Tyndale Pentateuch (1534), note to Gen. 15.

³ Matthew Bible (1537, 1549), notes to Rom. 13.

⁴ Coverdale Bible (1535), synopsis of I Pet. 2; Matthew Bible (1537), notes to Exod. 21 and Titus 3; "A Table of the Fryncypall Matters." The notes to Exod. 21 and Titus 3 are also printed in the Taverner Bible (1539).

⁵ Great Bible (1539), synopsis of I Pet. 2.

⁶ Tyndale-Coverdale New Testament (1538), notes to Luke 22; John 10 (quoted).

⁷ Cf. also the Tyndale-Rogers New Testament (1538), note to Rom. 13; Tyndale-
Erasmus New Testament (1549), note to Acts 4.

This was the standard doctrine of political obedience espoused in the Church of England from the 1530s into the early 1550s. No matter how severe the tyranny, resistance was strictly proscribed.⁸

Thoroughly imbued in this doctrine of political obedience, English Protestants initially reacted to the repressive Marian policies by explaining them as deserved punishment for the people's failure to embrace the Gospel more ardently.⁹ Moreover, persecution might benefit Christians by enabling them to share in the cross of Christ.¹⁰ The appalling cruelty wreaked upon Protestants in the Marian years did not shake the belief of most Protestants in the duty to obey where possible and suffer as necessary to uphold their principles.¹¹ Others, however, began to urge—on premises akin to those proposed by John Calvin to the Huguenots—that the aristocracy act, particularly in parliament, to defend both the commonwealth and the Gospel from Catholic depredations.¹² This was to be constitutional activity, however, and not active disobedience to overthrow a tyrannical or idolatrous regime. Had the aristocracy moved in this manner to check the Marian persecutions, they would not have violated the basic premises of the traditional doctrine of political obedience.

New ground was broken by John Ponet, Christopher Goodman and John Knox. Ponet's *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* (1556) openly advocated tyrannicide against Mary Tudor because her rule contravened divine and natural law and her marriage to Philip of Spain betrayed England into foreign hands. Tyrannicide was not a disavowal of political duty but—for Ponet—an affirmation of it. One's ultimate civic responsibility was not to a personal monarch but to a constitutional sovereignty solidly rooted in divine and natural law. To overthrow a tyrant was to render political obedience to this constitutional sovereignty.¹³ In *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyd* (1558), Goodman too called for the deposition of Mary Tudor, insisting that tyrants forfeited their right to rule by oppressing their subjects and blaspheming God. By acting in this manner, a tyrant dissolved the contractual bonds with the people, who thereupon no longer owed him political submission. In fact, to submit to

⁸ Matthew Bible (1549, 1551), note to Rom. 13.

⁹ Thomas Becon, *A Comfortable Epistle* (Strassburg, 1554), sig. A3v; Thomas Cranmer, *A Confutation of Vnwritten Verities* (n.d.), sig. A3v.

¹⁰ John Scory, *An Epistle Wrytten vnto All the Faythfull* (1555), sig. A4v; John Philpot, *The Trew Report of the Dysputacyon* (n.d.), sigs. A3r, A4r.

¹¹ *A Letter Sent from a Banished Minister of Jesus Christ* (Rouen, 1554), sig. A5r-v. This author likewise stresses the benefits of suffering (sig. A5v).

¹² William Turner, *A New Booke of Spirituall Physik* ([Emden], 1555), fols. 16r-17v, 21v-22r. Cf. John Foxe, *Ad inclytos ac praepotentes Angliae . . . supplicatio* (Basle, 1557).

¹³ The best analysis of Ponet's views is that of Winthrop S. Hudson, *John Ponet (1516?-1556): Advocate of Limited Monarchy* (Chicago, 1942), which includes a reprint of Ponet's tract. See also Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York, 1971), pp. 92-113, for an overview of the political views of the Marian exiles.

an ungodly sovereign was tantamount to rebellion against God himself.¹⁴

Knox's concern with political obedience was directed not only to Mary Tudor but also to Mary of Guise in Scotland. At the heart of his position was his concept of a covenant between sovereign and subjects, as well as the more fundamental covenant between God and the elect. As part of the latter covenant, the saints had to observe the divine law, including the provision to suppress idolaters, whether kings or commoners. Subjects were not bound by oath to render obedience to tyrants, but might justly depose and punish them. Even after Elizabeth ascended her throne, Knox wrote to his English friends in January 1559 in a *Brief Exhortation to England*, urging them to assume responsibility for the religious policies of the new regime. The queen, he insisted, would be unworthy to govern if she made the slightest alteration in religion as it was set forth in Scripture. If she embraced Catholicism, Knox demanded that she be executed. Political obedience was thus predicated entirely on a series of covenant obligations, commencing with the bond between God and his saints and extending to the pact between a sovereign and his subjects. In effect, sovereignty was vested in a ruler by God through the agency of the people, who were the ultimate determiners of whether the prince's policies met the scriptural test necessary to govern.¹⁵

Elizabethan Protestants thus had three distinctive positions on political obedience from which to choose. They could embrace the older view with its emphasis on submission to the divinely ordained powers and its admonition to suffer rather than rebel, or they could accept the Calvinist theory which gave the lesser magistrates the right to depose a tyrant. They could also follow Ponet, Goodman, and Knox in accepting the responsibility for an activist role in assessing and if necessary removing tyrannical or idolatrous rulers. This was a choice which had serious ramifications for both the government and its citizens, as the Privy Council itself recognized. In May 1579, for instance, the Council determined that it had to examine one John Flower of Northampton, whose views on political obedience seemed to threaten the state's security. He had allegedly said: "What if we have a wicked Prince? What; shall we obey her conscience? No; I will not."¹⁶

Curiously, assertions of tyrannicide provoked less concern than Knox's attack on the right of women to govern. Richard Bertie, husband of the Duchess of Suffolk, refuted Knox on both legal and biblical grounds in an unpublished treatise.¹⁷ Knox was also criticized in *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes* (Strassburg, 1559) by the former

¹⁴ Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyd* (1558), pp. 133 ff. See also Skinner, *Foundations*, 2: 221-24.

¹⁵ For a fuller exposition of the development of Knox's views, see Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, pp. 126-56, and the sources cited there.

¹⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. John Roche Dasent, New Series, 11 (1895): 132-33; cf. 158-59.

¹⁷ British Library, Additional MS 48,043.

Marian exile John Aylmer, who cited Scripture, law, history and logic to substantiate the right of women to rule. In Scotland, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, refuted Knox in *A Defence of the Honour of the Right Highe, Mightye and Noble Princesse Marie Quene of Scotlande* (1569). As late as 1571, Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, used natural, civil, and divine law to repudiate Knox. While Northampton's thesis focused on gynocracy, the issue of political obedience was manifest in his concern that "the vulgar multitude . . . hath eares to heare and eyes to see but no discretion to judge. . . ."¹⁸ Nevertheless, the nature and limits of obedience were dealt with only tangentially in these polemical tracts. In contrast, two of the age's sharpest Anglican controversialists—Richard Bancroft and Matthew Sutcliffe—expressly castigated the doctrine of political obedience and tyrannicide propounded by the more radical Marian exiles, and the closely related views of the Huguenot theorist François Hotman, Calvin's successor Theodore Beza, and the Scottish reformer George Buchanan. Bancroft and Sutcliffe wrote in the 1590s, in the context of the church's campaign to crush Presbyterianism, whose leaders were thought to favor the more radical doctrine of political obedience.¹⁹

Generally, Elizabethan Anglicans (or "Conformists") adopted the conservative position on political compliance. Repeatedly they emphasized the duty of submitting to the civil authorities, subject only to the standard proviso that this obedience did not extend to matters which directly contravened Scripture. John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, summed it up thus: "The subject is bound to obey his prince; howbeit not in all things without exception, but so far as God's glory is not touched."²⁰ In other matters, regardless of how tyrannical the laws became, they had to be observed, for "disobedience to the prince in civil matters," as John Whitgift insisted, "is disobedience to God."²¹ This held true even if the sovereign were an infidel. A wicked ruler was regarded as a divinely ap-

¹⁸ Henry Howard, "A Dutifull Defence of the Lawfull Regiment of Weomen," British Library, Lansdowne MS 813, fol. 3r.

¹⁹ Richard Bancroft, *A Svrvey of the Pretended Holy Discipline* (1593), pp. 15, 48, 51-52; Matthew Sutcliffe, *An Answere to a Certaine Libel Supplicatorie, or Rather Diffamatory* (1592), p. 95.

²⁰ John Jewel, *The Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1845-50), 3:173. See also Leonard Wright, *A Display of Dutie* (1589), p. 12. The term "Anglican" is, of course, an anachronism, but is less objectionable than "Conformist", which to some has negative connotations. The terms "Anglican" and "Puritan" must be used with caution and in the context of a broad continuum of views that characterized the Elizabethan Church of England. For a fuller explication of my usage of these terms see my *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), pp. 3-10.

²¹ John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1851-53), 2:50. See also Thomas Cooper, *An Admonition to the People of England* (1589), p. 215; Cooper, *A Briefe Exposition of Such Chapters* [1573], sigs. DDD8v-EEEEr; Christopher Sutton, *Disce Vivere* [1604], p. 330; Richard Hooker, *The Works of . . . Richard Hooker*, ed. John Keble (3rd ed; Oxford, 1845), 3:456-60.

pointed curse and a means to try the saints.²²

Anglicans mandated disobedience to temporal authority only in matters which directly contradicted Scripture. According to John Carpenter, rector of Northleigh, Devon, this entailed “diuellish, vngodly, and superstitious lawes and decrees, as tend to the dishonour of almighty God, and the perdition of the innocent people of God, an horror to the conscience, and a greefe to the mind of all good men. . . .”²³ The Bishop of Winchester, Thomas Cooper, took a more direct approach by sanctioning disobedience to any civil orders which “breake into the boundes of our duetie towardes God. . . .” When this happened, Cooper, citing Daniel as an example, insisted on non-compliance, even to the point of losing one’s property or life.²⁴ Carpenter, who was similarly opposed to active rebellion as a violation of divine and natural law, contended that resistance could take the form of speaking, writing, or praying, but not open rebellion. Doing what God commanded, argued James Pilkington, Bishop of Durham, was not rebellion against civil authority. Inasmuch as every magistrate was inferior in power to God, the commands of the latter always took precedence. Because the Anglicans insisted that religious discipline, liturgy, and other customs were *adiaphora* and not expressly stipulated in the Bible, they averred that such matters were within the purview of the civil authorities and consequently had to be obeyed.²⁵

One of the most difficult objections with which the Anglicans had to deal was the example of the reformation in Geneva. In this instance, the prince-bishop’s authority was toppled in the 1520s, an event which subsequently prompted Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, to observe that he “neuer thought it agreeable to Diuinity, for ministers to caste off] their rulers, at their owne pleasures.” Regardless of the religious profession of a civil magistrate, Bancroft asserted, there was no justification in the Gospel to wrest his authority from him.²⁶ In short, the example of rebellious Geneva was not to be emulated.

The Anglican position on political obedience was generally reflected in the marginalia of the Bishop’s Bible (1568). Ideally, those who govern should be godly and wise, following the example of Josiah (2 Chron. 34), but tyrants were sometimes appointed by God in order “to punishe his people” Tyrants themselves, however, were soon to be the subjects of divine wrath. On the critical issue of submission, the annotators praised Daniel for resisting a royal commandment to dishonor God, but the warned the reader not to “withdraw . . . thy selfe lightly from the kynges obedience.” A godly person could admonish a magistrate moderately, so long

²² James Pilkington, *The Works of James Pilkington*, ed. James Scholefield (Cambridge, 1842), pp. 23-24; Thomas Jackson, *Davids Pastorall Poeme* (1603), pp. 205, 208-9.

²³ John Carpenter, *A Preparatiue to Contentation* (1597), p. 157.

²⁴ Cooper, *An Admonition*, p. 215.

²⁵ Carpenter, *A Preparatiue*, pp. 160-61; Pilkington, *Works*, p. 364; Leonard Wright, *The Hunting of Antichrist* (1589), sig. D4r.

²⁶ Bancroft, *A Survay*, p. 14.

as he stopped short of outright rebukes and railing and did not encourage a breakdown of orderly government. Lesser magistrates in particular had a duty to disobey iniquitous laws, especially to protect the innocent. A contrast was drawn between the saints, who obeyed God, and the worldly, who adhered to the wicked commandments of unscrupulous princes. Thus the marginalia reinforced the Anglican position.²⁷

Although the Presbyterians were accused of teaching the legitimacy of rebellion against civil authority,²⁸ Elizabethan Puritans substantially agreed with the Anglicans on civil obedience. Edward Dering's catechism is representative of the Puritan attitude when it calls on the godly "to be obedient in all things, vnto Kings, Princes, Iudges, and such other Officers, as farre as they commaunde ciuill things, that is to say, such things as are indifferent, and not contrary to the commaundements of God." Rather than violate a divine command, a Christian willingly had to forfeit his property and his life, but to resist legitimate temporal demands was in effect rebellion against God.²⁹ Conscience was the key in determining the proper object of obedience, for it was never justifiable to violate one's conscience in order to comply with a magistrate's decree. In fact, conscience bound one *not* to fulfill such commands.³⁰

Elizabethan Puritans firmly resolved not to allow active political resistance. No matter how wicked a ruler was, subjects could not rebel, even to preserve their lives. Although the state had no power over the conscience, the godly could not lay hands on civil officials for any reason inasmuch as they were divinely anointed rulers.³¹ There was also a fear that in overthrowing tyranny "they make three Hydraes, or else . . . reduce their gouernment to a troublesome Democracie."³² Even the more radical Presbyterian wing of the Puritan movement embraced this quiescent position. John Udall, for example, considered no more than praying for the overthrow of wicked rulers, while William Fulke maintained that the godly would die if necessary but not revolt. The Presbyterian Richard Parker, however, may have approved active political disobedience. In his judgment, no person had to yield his legal rights to life or property to a

²⁷ Bishops' Bible (1568), notes to Exod. 1:17; 22:27; Deut. 1:15; I Sam. 11:2; I Kings 3:9; 21:11; II Chron. 34:7; Ecc. 8:3; Song of Solomon 7:5; Dan. 6:15, 22; 11:36; Rom. 13:5.

²⁸ Matthew Sutcliffe, *An Answere to a Certaine Libel Supplicatorie* (1592), pp. 82-83.

²⁹ Edward Dering, *A Briefe and Necessary Catechisme*, in *M. Derings Workes* (1597), sigs. D4r-v, G2v. See also Philip Stubbes, *A Motiue to Good Workes* (1593), pp. 156-59; John Stockwood, *A Verie Godlie and Profitable Sermon* (1584), sig. D2v; George Gifford, *A Briefe Discourse of Certaine Pointes of the Religion* (1581), fols. 22v-23r; John Gardiner, *A Briefe and Cleare Confession of the Christian Fayth* (1579), fol. 37r-v; William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (1591), sig. K2r.

³⁰ Henry Smith, *The Magistrates Scripture* (1591), p. 21; William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge, 1606), pp. 854-55.

³¹ [Thomas Becon], *A New Postil*, 2 vols. (1566), 2: ff. 179v-180r; Stubbes, *A Motiue*, pp. 158-59; William Vaughan, *The Golden-groue* (2nd ed., 1608), sig. S8v; George Gifford, *A Dialogue Betweene a Papist and a Protestant* (1582), fol. 104v.

³² Vaughan, *The Golden-groue*, sig. T2r.

tyrant, "but is bounde in conscience to use all lawfull meanes to the uttermost of his power" to defend them. Such "lawful meanes," which unfortunately were not specified, might be used even more appropriately to preserve "the glorie of god, the salvation of mens soules and the righte of the Church . . ." ³³ Thus, with the possible exception of a few Presbyterians, Elizabethan Puritans did not openly espouse either the Calvinist position on the legitimacy of tyrannicide when led by lesser magistrates, or the more radical Ponet-Goodman-Knox defense of the right of the people to overthrow a tyrant or an idolater. In short, Anglicans and Puritans publicly acknowledged that, in the words of the Beza-Tomson Bible's marginalia, "the Christians must obey their Magistrates, although they be wicked and extortioners, but so farre forth as the authoritie that God hath ouer vs may remaine safe vnto him, and his honour be not diminished." ³⁴

Even the Elizabethan Separatists adopted a doctrine of political obedience which ruled out active rebellion. Subjects, declared Henry Barrow, were not to endeavor to reform the state without the prince's sanction, but neither were they to do or consent to anything unlawful which the sovereign might command. Civil authorities were subject to divine law as well as church censure, and could not make legal anything forbidden by God. If a prince prohibited the godly from the pursuit of their religious duties, "they must doe that which God commaundeth, neverthelesse." With respect to commands which contravened divine law, Christians were to refuse obedience, but there could be no active opposition—only prayer. ³⁵

Although Elizabethan Protestants were nearly in full accord in their advocacy of passive disobedience to tyrannical rule, the Calvinist theory of obedience was kept alive throughout the period in the marginalia of the Geneva Bible (1560). Nearly two hundred editions of this classic were published before the Civil War, and its marginal notes were printed in at least five editions of the Authorized (King James') Version commencing in 1642. The views in the Geneva Bible reached a larger audience than any other religious work published in the Elizabethan era. Authorship of the notes is still the subject of scholarly dispute, though the exiles who played the greatest role were undoubtedly William Whittingham and Anthony Gilby. Throughout the voluminous notes are numerous observations of a political nature. ³⁶

³³ John Udall, *A Commentarie upon the Lamentations* (1595), p. 55; William Fulke, *The Text of the New Testament* (1589), fols. 258v-259; Richard Parker, in *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Roland G. Usher (1905), p. 97. By 1589, of course, Fulke had retreated from his more radical views of the 1570s.

³⁴ Beza-Tomson Bible (1577), note to Matt. 22:17.

³⁵ Henry Barrow, *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590*, ed. Leland H. Carlson (1962), pp. 27 (quoted), 124, 180, 200, 643.

³⁶ See Hardin Craig, Jr., "The Geneva Bible as a Political Document," *Pacific Historical Review*, 7 (1938): 40-49; Richard L. Greaves, "The Nature and Intellectual Milieu of the Political Principles in the Geneva Bible Marginalia," *Journal of Church and State*, 22 (Spring 1980): 233-49.

In the Geneva marginalia there is a basic reaffirmation of the concept that evil as well as just rulers are divinely appointed, and that the actions of both can be controlled by God for his ends. Normally, therefore, the godly had to respect civil authority, except in those cases where rulers commanded things contrary to Scripture.³⁷ To this point, there is fundamental agreement between the teachings of Elizabethan Protestants and the views of the exiles in the Geneva marginalia. The latter, however, contain statements reflecting the Calvinist doctrine of active political disobedience when directed by lesser magistrates. Yet the New Testament notes generally emphasize the duty of submitting to the secular powers, warning that private persons are expressly forbidden from using force against the government. Moreover, "no priuate man can contemne that gouernement w^c God hathe appointed without y^e breache of his conscience," but nothing is said that would prohibit the exercise of such authority by lesser magistrates.³⁸

The Geneva notes to the Old Testament, done under the supervision of Anthony Gilby, sanction the legitimacy of active resistance by inferior magistrates, but not by the people. This was the position advanced by Calvin in his *Institutes*.³⁹ When the Geneva annotators came to the account of Jehu's killing of Queen Jezebel and Kings Joram and Ahaziah, they made it clear that he acted as God's agent and not as a private person. When Athaliah, Queen of Judah, was murdered by the people, the latter were following the leadership of Jehoida, a divinely appointed agent and priest, and acting in the name of the recently anointed claimant to the throne, King Joash. The annotators were careful not to place the right of active resistance in the hands of the masses, but insisted instead on preserving the divine initiative: "Thogh men according to their office do not punish tyrants . . . yet God bothe is able, and his iustice wil punish them."⁴⁰

Some Elizabethan Protestants, especially among the Puritans, may have accepted the Calvinist position on resistance, but if so, they were silent on the issue. There was, of course, no need to discuss it with a Protestant sovereign on the throne. Moreover, there was a substantial outcry among Elizabethan Protestants—particularly the Puritans—against the Catholic position on tyrannicide. In these circumstances, there was no incentive to argue the case for the Calvinist theory, especially when this

³⁷ *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison, 1969), notes to Exod. 20:12; 2 Chron. 2:12; 5:26; 36:17; Jer. 42:11; Dan. 11:27; Luke 20:25; Acts 5:29; Titus 3:1; I Pet. 2:18.

³⁸ Geneva Bible, notes to Matt. 26:52; Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:5.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles and ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1960), bk. 4, chap. 20, p. 30. For Gilby, see Dan G. Danner, "Anthony Gilby: Puritan in Exile—A Biographical Approach," *Church History*, 40 (December 1971): 412-22. For an analysis of the Calvinist position, see Skinner, *Foundations*, 2:191-94; Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, pp. 57-65.

⁴⁰ Geneva Bible, notes to I Sam. 26:9; II Kings 9:33, II Chron. 23:21; Job 4:10 (quoted).

would have provided the Catholics with a more effective rebuttal in defense of their own views. As it was, Catholic apologists could cite Ponet, Goodman, and Knox in their attacks against the Protestants. Richard Bristow, a principal assistant to William Allen at Douai and Rheims, charged that the Protestant church ‘riseth by disobedience to both the Swordes [secular and spiritual]: . . . [it] counteth all Regiment [government] of women to be monstrous: . . . [it] standeth by traiterous murdering of great Persons. . . .’⁴¹ In similar fashion, Matthew Kellison, Regius Professor of Divinity at Rheims, accused Protestants of temporizing because they argued in the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor that women could not govern, but reversed themselves at the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth.⁴²

During Elizabeth’s reign English Catholics said relatively little about active political resistance. Much of what they did say was in accord with Protestant thought. Kellison, for instance, urged people to submit to princes except when the latter commanded something in violation of God’s ordinances, in which case prior obedience was owed to god. Bristow even argued that “temporal Princes for God and conscience-sake, be they neuer so euil, are in al lauful cases duely serued” Robert Shelford concurred, warning that anarchy could result from holding civil authorities in contempt.⁴³

Undoubtedly the most influential work by Elizabethan Catholics was the Rheims New Testament, with its extensive explanatory notes. The gloss on Rom. 13:1 expressed the basic thesis that all persons must be subject to temporal authorities except “in matters of religion or regiment of their soules,” for “against God no power may be obeied” With this a Protestant could have agreed—as Thomas Cartwright explicitly did.⁴⁴ Moreover, Cartwright approved of the Rheims note to 1 Peter 2:13, admonishing Christians not to act toward secular rulers in such a fashion that the heathen would regard them as disobedient or seditious.⁴⁵ The Catholic annotators, of course, rejected the right of a secular ruler to be supreme head of a church. Obedience to secular rulers was not, however, terminated by their iniquitous actions. As with the Protestants, submission to princes was part of one’s duty to God; a Catholic who resisted lawful commands committed a mortal sin. In all spiritual matters, the Rheims annotators made it clear that the godly must follow “their Apostles and Prelates” on pain of damnation for recalcitrance.⁴⁶ Pius V’s bull, *Regnans in excelsis*, promulgated in February 1570, provided a

⁴¹ Richard Bristow, *A Briefe Treatise of Divers Plaine and Sure Waies to Finde out the Truth* (Antwerp, 1599), fol. 154v.

⁴² Matthew Kellison, *A Survey of the New Religion* (Douai, 1603), pp. 483-84.

⁴³ Kellison, *A Survey*, pp. 480-81; Bristow, *A Briefe Treatise*, fol. 153v; Robert Shelford, *Lectures or Readings upon . . . Prouerbs* (1606), p. 46.

⁴⁴ Thomas Cartwright, *A Confutation of the Rhemists Translation, Glosses and Annotations on the New Testament* (1618), p. 368.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

⁴⁶ Rheims New Testament (Rheims 1582, 1600), notes to Luke 20:25; Rom. 13:2 (quoted); I Pet. 2:13, 18.

foundation for active political resistance by absolving Elizabeth's subjects of fealty to her. The Jesuit missionaries, however, had the authority to relieve English Catholics of obedience to the bull's decrees until conditions became more propitious. In December 1580, Gregory XIII's secretary explicitly sanctioned tyrannicide: "Since that guilty woman of England rules over two such noble kingdoms of Christendom and is the cause of so much injury to the Catholic faith and loss of so many million souls, there is no doubt that whosoever sends her out of the world with the pious intention of doing God service, not only does not sin but gains merit."⁴⁷ For Catholics the lines of loyalty were clearly demarcated: temporal princes cannot claim spiritual obedience, nor can their subjects render it to them. If the church requires active resistance as a spiritual duty, the Christian must obey ecclesiastical authority, "for against God no power may be obeyed."⁴⁸

Against this Catholic theory of resistance there was a sustained Protestant outcry. Cartwright, for example, boasted that Protestants did not betray their temporal sovereigns or lie in wait to assassinate them, as the Jesuits urged their adherents to do. Referring to the assassinations of William of Orange and Henry III of France, the Puritan pamphleteer and gentleman, Philip Stubbes, sarcastically observed that "the Papists . . . thinke it a worke of inestimable merite before God, to laie violent handes vpon the Lordes anointed, to kil and murther Emperours, Kings, and Princes, & when they haue done, they are canonized Saintes for theyr labour." To Protestants, the espousal of tyrannicide by the Catholics rendered them traitors to God, violators of the fifth commandment, and "rotten-hearted subiects to all true christian princes."⁴⁹

It is clear, then, that Elizabethan Protestants repudiated the ideology of active political resistance and returned to the views espoused in early Tudor England. The radical thesis of Ponet, Goodman, and Knox was virtually ignored until the English Revolution, when a comparable theory was advocated by John Milton and others. That view in turn became enshrined, *mutatis mutandis*, in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Although Locke abandoned the religious arguments used by the radical thinkers of the 1550s, he retained their reliance on natural law as the justification for his theory. The historian cannot help but conclude that the genealogical accident of royal descent—Protestant Edward, Catholic Mary, Protestant Elizabeth—was the determining factor in the development of the Tudor views on political obedience. Without Mary Tudor, the resistance theories of Ponet and Goodman (and possibly Knox) would not

⁴⁷ Quoted in Sir J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (New York, 1957), p. 258.

⁴⁸ Rheims New Testament, notes to Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1 (quoted).

⁴⁹ Cartwright, *A Confutation*, pp. 368-69; Stubbes, *A Motive*, pp. 101, 103-4; Gifford, *A Dialogue*, fols. 104v-105r; Francis Marbury, *A Fruitful Sermon* (1602), sig. D6r; J. Baxter, *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes* (1600), p. 135 (quoted). See also John Gibson, *The Sacred Shield of Al True Christian Souldiers* (1599), p. 65; John Field, *A Caveat for Parson Howlet* [1581], sigs. F5r-G1v; [Francis Trigge], *A Touchstone* (1599), pp. 291, 300.

have been developed, and if Mary Stuart had succeeded Mary Tudor, English Protestants would not have been so quick to desert the radical Marian theorists. But Knox took his thesis back to Scotland in 1559 and used it in 1567 to depose Mary Stuart. Beginning in 1637, it again served as the intellectual justification for the series of events in which the Scots defended their Kirk and ultimately went to war against King Charles. And by 1642 the Elizabethan Protestant concept of political obedience was set aside by those who were willing to engage Charles in military conflict for constitutional and religious ends.

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY