OBEEDIENCE AND DISOBEEDIENCE IN ENGLISH

POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1528-1558

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

James Kevin Culberson, B.A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1994
OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE IN ENGLISH

POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1528-1558

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

James Kevin Culberson, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1994
Culberson, James Kevin, *Obedience and Disobedience in English Political Thought, 1528-1558*. Master of Arts (History), August, 1994, 150 pp., bibliography, 330 titles.

English political thought from 1528 to 1558 was dominated by the question of obedience to civil authority. English Lutherans stressed the duty of obedience to the prince as the norm; however, if he commands that which is immoral one should passively disobey. The defenders of Henrician royal supremacy, while attempting to strengthen the power of the crown, used similar arguments to stress unquestioned obedience to the king. During Edward VI's reign this teaching of obedience was popularized from the pulpit. However, with the accession of Mary a new view regarding obedience gained prominence. Several important Marian exiles contended that the principle that God is to be obeyed rather than man entails the duty of Christians to resist idolatrous and evil rulers for the sake of the true Protestant religion.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience, non-resistance, and resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian obedience and non-resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare on resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. OBERDIENCE IN ENGLISH LUTHERAN THOUGHT, 1520-1531</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther's political thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther's theological framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political consequences of Luther's theology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther on obedience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Lutherans and obedience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Tyndale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Barnes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ROYAL SUPREMACY AND THE NECESSITY OF OBEEDIENCE, 1531-1547</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The divorce and royal supremacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The defense of the king</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience and royal supremacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Sampson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Fox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Gardiner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King's Book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Starkey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. OBERDIENCE IN THE REFORMED ENGLISH CHURCH, 1547-1553</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience in English sermons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Cranmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Homily on Obedience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh Latimer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hooper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Cheke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. ENGLISH CALVINISM AND RESISTANCE, 1553-1558 . . . . . . . . . . . . . 94

Lutheran and Calvinist resistance theories
English resistance theories
John Ponet
Christopher Goodman
John Knox
Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 126
INTRODUCTION

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.

Shakespeare, Richard II 3.2.59-62

Then if you fight against God's enemy,
God will in justice ward you as his soldiers;
If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,
You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain.

Shakespeare, Richard III 5.3.253-61

Political thought in the first half of the sixteenth century was, to a remarkable degree, devoted to the question of obedience to authority, especially obedience to the prince. This is true not only for political theory in Europe taken as a whole, but it is also a major distinguishing characteristic of English political ideas of the era. English theologians and writers of the era, both Protestant and Catholic, dealt extensively with the issue of obedience to the crown.

The Christian church had traditionally emphasized obedience to authority. Patristic writers Fathers such as Tertullian (c. 160-240), Origen (c. 185-254), Ambrose of

1 Quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
Milan (340-397), John Chrysostom (347-407), and Augustine (354-430) had argued that Christians are to obey their rulers unless their dictates violate the clear commands of God. They taught that passages such as Romans 13 and I Peter 2 urged passive obedience to existing governmental authority. These ideas continued to dominate the church's teaching on obedience to civil government throughout the medieval era.

Nevertheless, during the late Middle Ages the church's emphasis on obedience was tempered somewhat. First, the papal revolution or investiture struggle (1075-1122) and its restatement of the two swords doctrine resulted in the subordination, at least in theory, of the state to the church: the pope could and did excommunicate and depose kings and emperors. Second, the feudal notion of mutual duties and obligations between lord and vassal and the seriousness of the contract binding both parties meant that vassals, even vassals of the king, could legally rise up against their lord if he broke his oath by violating the contract. Third, conciliarism placed a limit on the authority of the pope by subordinating his power to that of a church council. This argument was easily refashioned to apply to kings and parliaments. Fourth, medieval political

---

theorists such as John of Salisbury (d. 1180), Thomas Aquinas (1225?-74), and William of Ockham (1300?-49) agreed that a tyrant can be deposed, for by his tyrannous actions he ceases to be a legitimate king.

There were, of course, reasons unique to England for the renewal of an emphasis on obedience, such as the fresh memory of the civil strife so endemic to the War of the Roses and the fact that the Tudor grip upon the scepter never seemed strong enough to satisfy the reigning monarch. Consequently, loyal servants vied for the opportunity to decry civil war and to defend the position of unquestioned obedience to the crown. Other writers insisted that while obedience is normally required, God must be obeyed rather than man; thus, they left open options ranging from the more common notion of passive non-resistance to the later idea of active resistance.

Authority, however, even political or secular authority, was not thought of as limited in any way to the authority of the crown.\(^3\) Authorities existed at various levels of society and with differing degrees of power and influence. There were, for example, officers such as judges, mayors, and sheriffs who exercised authority within their own separate and limited spheres. At another level

---

the nobility, with its customary role in the governance of England, continued to hold sway. In fact, the English Parliament represented a substantial political authority, while not yet rivaling that of the king. The authority of these officers was discussed freely by political theorists, but generally by way of analogy to the greater authority of the king; for concomitant to the development of the idea of national sovereignty in England was an attendant emphasis on the importance of the crown.

As far as spiritual matters go, authority was exercised by churchmen from the parish priest to the pope himself. The exact relationship between these two spheres of authority, civil and ecclesiastical, was also a hotly debated topic.

Obedience, Non-Resistance, and Resistance

The issue of obedience to authority was one of the most important questions for political theorists in sixteenth-century England. In relation to the king, the supreme ruler of the country, the question was fairly straightforward: Must one always obey the dictates of one's ruler? If disobedience is permissible, then under what circumstances? Can one actively resist the commands of a ruler, and if so, under what circumstances? This, in turn, led to other fundamental questions: What are the characteristics of a tyrant and his antithesis, a virtuous prince? What are the
respective duties of subjects and of rulers? Finally, who is able to depose a tyrant, and under what circumstances can such action be taken lawfully?

These were not, of course, new questions in the sixteenth century. Philosophers and theologians had for millennia attempted to settle this issue, from Aristotle and Plato to Augustine and Aquinas. What made the answers developed in the first half of sixteenth-century England different was the impact of two events: the development of English national sovereignty and the Protestant Reformation. Tudor monarchs were able to appeal successfully to an incipient sense of national pride. Moreover, a climate particularly appreciative of the value of obedience to authority existed in England due to the recent civil wars over the succession of the crown. On the other hand, Protestant soteriology and political theory signaled a significant break with recent medieval tradition and a hearkening back, in a more direct fashion, to the tradition of the early church and the authority of Scripture. In addition, obedience to authority, both secular and spiritual, was a very complex issue due to the political influence of the church, both Roman Catholic and English, and the increasing involvement of the crown in the administration of the English church. Nor were church and state the neatly divided and disjointed categories of the twentieth century. Consequently, the religious and
political elements in the arguments were virtually inseparable.

Christian Obedience and Non-Resistance

To the question of obedience to secular authority most English writers in the sixteenth century responded "that all secular authority was derived from God and that rebellion was always wrong." However, this was not exclusively a Protestant belief; it was commonly taught all over Europe. The remarks of J. W. Allen are to the point:

Everywhere in the first half of the [sixteenth] century the Protestants were preaching the same doctrine. Even the mass of those currently called Anabaptists taught submission to civil authority. Nor was there anything at all distinctively Protestant about that doctrine.

Nevertheless, the most articulate defenders of obedience were, in England, primarily Protestants. While emphasizing the necessity of obedience to secular rulers, these writers left room for the individual to disobey his ruler, but never take up arms, if the ruler required him to sin by violating God's commandments in Scripture.

During the late 1520s and early 1530s, the most important Lutheran converts to propagate Martin Luther's version of the doctrine of obedience and non-resistance in

---


England were William Tyndale (1492-1536) and Robert Barnes (1495-1540), both of whom had studied at Wittenberg during the 1520s. During the reign of Henry VIII (r. 1509-47) official royal propagandists also emphasized the importance of obedience to the crown, including men such as Richard Sampson (d. 1554), Edward Fox (1496-1538), Stephen Gardiner (1493-1555), and Thomas Starkey (1499-1538). Under Edward VI (r. 1547-53) those defending obedience included prelates in the Church of England such as John Hooper (d. 1555), Hugh Latimer (1485-1555), and Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), with Sir John Cheke (1514-57) also being an important advocate.

Christian Resistance

With the return to Catholicism during the reign of Mary Tudor (r. 1553-8), an idea sprang forth which was a harbinger of things to come. John Ponet (1514-56), Christopher Goodman (1520-1603), and John Knox (1514-72) wrote treatises while in exile from England defending the "theory of the right of inferior magistrates to resist their superiors for the sake of religion." There had been a strong medieval tradition that allowed for resistance against a king who could, under various circumstances, be resisted. Protestants, following Luther's hesitant change

---

6 Cargill Thompson, *Political Thought of Luther*, 92.
of mind in the 1530s regarding resistance, were at first slow to develop this theory of active resistance but soon articulated a theory of revolution which would be secularized by John Locke (1632-1704) a century later.

This question, the legitimacy of resistance against the state, was, in short, one of the most important issues in sixteenth century political thought. Francis Oakley writes:

> Forcible resistance to the princes and potentates of this world had rarely been an occasion for moral anguish among late medieval Catholics. But Luther's rejection of it as sinful transformed it for the remainder of the sixteenth century and a goodly part of the seventeenth as well into the central and critical question confronting European political thinkers.

In England the very posing of the question of active resistance against the state was, for Tudor and Stuart monarchs alike, a cause for grave concern, resulting in a good deal of propaganda designed to convince their subjects of the inherent sinfulness of rebellion against authority.

**Shakespeare on Resistance**

As evidence of the Tudor interest in this issue consider the works of William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Many

---


of his plays dramatize what was to Shakespeare and his contemporaries a vital question: Is it legitimate to rebel against a magistrate, especially a king? This question is present in some manner in Shakespeare's history plays and in other plays, most notably *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. In these plays Shakespeare explores various circumstances leading to rebellion and the results, both personal and public, of rebellion. According to E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare presents a uniform view which he calls the "orthodox" doctrine "of rebellion" and Lily B. Campbell designates the "accepted Tudor philosophy of kingship" — that rebellion is always illegitimate.\(^9\)

The key elements of this doctrine of obedience are an insistence upon the idea that God ordains and protects the king, that God alone can chastise him, and that passive obedience is required of his subjects. In addition, God forbids active rebellion against the king even if he is a tyrant, for an evil ruler is preferable to the anarchy of rebellion.

The point can be argued, however, that Shakespeare is more subtle than that. Private rebellion and tyrannicide, such as that of Bolingbroke against King Richard in *Richard II* or of Brutus against Caesar in *Julius Caesar*, even when directed against the demonstrated tyranny of a monarch, is

viewed as wrong by many characters. Similarly, the civil strife and eventual murder of King Henry in *Henry VI*, who is no tyrant despite his weaknesses and vacillating tendencies, is condemned by many. On the other hand, King Richard in *Richard III*, in keeping with the Tudor myth, is undoubtedly a tyrant whose overthrow is justified, resulting in the establishment of the Tudor dynasty by Henry of Richmond.

The point here is that Shakespeare, as a dramatist, brought to life what was an important issue to his fellow Elizabethans. So why did he do so? In the relatively stable society of twentieth century America it may be difficult to imagine how complex the problem of rebellion against authority was to a sixteenth-century audience, or, for that matter, how complex it is in other parts of the world today. Modern Americans tend to be ambivalent in their attitudes toward revolutions. While idealizing the American Revolution of two hundred years ago, Americans are generally more cautious about contemporary revolutions. Part of the greatness of Shakespeare consists in his ability to show the complexity of the problem of rebellion against authority, for this was indeed an important issue to Englishmen in the sixteenth century.

**Conclusion**

The following pages will trace two ideas on obedience. First, the notion that obedience is owed to those in
authority will be examined through the eyes of its many proponents, from the late 1520s to the 1550s, and in the context of their political thought as a whole. The development of this idea as it became the orthodox Tudor policy will then be explored. Second, the doctrine of resistance by lesser magistrates, usually associated with Calvinism, will be discussed, showing the important role English writers of the 1550s played in its development. The focus will be on examining and explaining the writings of leading English political theorists of the era and assessing their importance in the development of these two ideas.

While political theory remains distinct from political opinions and policies, there is little doubt that they greatly influence and affect one another. The ideas developed by Englishmen were not created in a vacuum, for they represent, in large part, the reaction of leading thinkers to the vagaries of political life and existing circumstances. Nor can one easily discern the exact relationship between the two. In this work the emphasis will be upon the actual political ideas or theories themselves and not upon government policy as it related to these ideas, though this will be examined as appropriate. In addition, particular attention will be paid to the reasons and justifications given by the various authors to support their positions, for this goes a long way toward explaining their ideas.
Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Romans 13:1-2).  

English political writers in Henry VIII's reign (r. 1509-1547), prior to the development of a party dedicated to defending the king's prerogatives and supremacy, were few. In addition they were, for the most part, protégés of Martin Luther (1483-1546), reiterating his theological and political ideas and forming part of the dispersion of Luther's ideas throughout northern Europe. These early attempts at rationalizing a defense of obedience owes much to Luther's own view of passive obedience and non-resistance. The evidence for Luther's influence lies not so much in the fact that they urged obedience, but in the arguments and ideas used to justify obedience. In fact, English theorists continued to borrow Luther's ideas and the actual arguments themselves throughout the Tudor era. Clearly the place to start, then, is with an examination of

1 All Scripture references are from the King James Version.
Luther's own political ideas.

**Luther's Political Thought**

Martin Luther's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, and his continued stance against many of the practices and doctrines of the Catholic church initiated the Protestant Reformation. Luther's attempts to reform the Catholic church soon led to a break with Rome over several crucial issues, most notably over the relationship between the authority of Scripture and tradition and over the role of faith and works in salvation. In his eagerness to overturn the pervasive political power of the Catholic church, Luther developed several important political ideas which his followers eagerly adopted as the logical consequences of his theology.

**Luther's Theological Framework**

The indebtedness of Luther's political ideas to his theological perspective has been pointed out frequently,²

and Francis Oakley has even gone so far as to characterize Luther's political thought as a "political theology."\(^3\)

This attention to the theological presuppositions of Luther's political thought is entirely justified, for Luther derived his political views from his theology, especially the doctrine of justification by faith, and the implications, as he saw it, of his theological perspective.

The centrality of theology in Luther's world view is an important distinguishing characteristic of his thought. In contradistinction to Erasmus, Luther "held that doctrines were essential to, and constitutive of, the Christian religion, and that the doctrine of the bondage of the will in particular was the corner-stone of the gospel and the very foundation of faith."\(^4\) Luther's understanding of Christianity, like Augustine's and contrary to Aquinas's, sprang from the notion that man is, by nature, a slave to sin and can do nothing to save himself; therefore, salvation must be solely the work of God. In 1525 Luther explained the relationship between God's efforts and man's efforts in salvation in the following manner:

---

\(^3\) Oakley, 170.

So, too, I say that man, before he is renewed into the new creation of the Spirit's kingdom, does and endeavors nothing to prepare himself for that new creation and kingdom, and when he is re-created he does and endeavors nothing towards his perseverance in that kingdom; but the Spirit alone works both blessings in us, regenerating us, and preserving us when regenerate, without ourselves.⁵

The sinner is justified by faith, for "faith takes hold of Christ."⁶ Faith, in turn, is itself the gift of God whereby God justifies the sinner, not because of his own good works, but on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. It is this doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone that formed the foundation for Luther's political thought.⁷

**Political Consequences of Luther's Ideas**

For Luther the nature of man is a fallen one, born in bondage to sin and not inherently good. Man, therefore, not only needs God's grace for regeneration, but he also needs the external controls of law and government to live in this world. Whereas justification is the instantaneous act of a holy God, sanctification is a continuous process through which sin is eradicated from the believer's life.

---

⁵ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 268.


⁷ Skinner, 2:8; Oakley, 165.
Consequently the Christian is, at the same time, a saint redeemed by Christ and a sinner with sinful desires and proclivities. He inhabits simultaneously two realms, that of Christ's kingdom and that of the kingdom of this world.

This contrast was the basic integrating idea for Luther's political thought: the vitally important distinction between the spiritual and the temporal realms, and the recognition that the Christian lives simultaneously in both. In Luther's view, the spiritual and temporal realms must be kept separate, for they are governed differently. His goal here was to keep the influence of the church within its scriptural boundaries as he saw them, particularly by limiting its influence upon the state. The ability of the pope and other church officials to dictate secular political affairs greatly concerned Luther. He saw the spiritual realm, identified primarily with the church, as the arena of faith and belief, not of political power. This is not to say that the individual Christian should not be involved in political affairs, for his concept of calling affirmed the sanctity of such a life dedicated to the service of one's fellow man.  

Luther best elucidated this idea in his 1520 address To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the

---

Reform of the Christian Estate.⁹ In this tract Luther attacked the pope's requirement that bishops swear feudal oaths to himself and his control over the ceremony of investiture. Moreover, Luther argued that, except for the act of anointing the king, "the pope should have no authority over the emperor."¹⁰ Quentin Skinner and Francis Oakley correctly see this argument as an attempt on Luther's part to deny to the church jurisdictional powers over temporal affairs.¹¹ Luther, following William of Ockham (1300?-49) and the conciliarists, sought to reverse the trend, since the time of the investiture struggle (1075-1122), toward an ever-increasing involvement and entanglement of the church in secular affairs. The church should, in Luther's estimation, limit itself to purely spiritual matters and not interfere with the state. The church should be the body of believers in Christ, not a

⁹ Martin Luther, To the Christian Nobility, in Luther's Works, 44:115-217.

¹⁰ Luther's Works, 44:164.

¹¹ Skinner, 2:13-14; Oakley, 170. On the late medieval division of ecclesiastical power into a power of order and a power of jurisdiction see Oakley, 162-3.

political entity or source of political power.\textsuperscript{13}

In his Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed,\textsuperscript{14} written in 1523, Luther rationalized this scheme by explaining clearly his notion of the two kingdoms. He divided all mankind into two classes: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Those in the kingdom of God, the true Christians, need no secular sword or law, for the Holy Spirit "teaches and makes them to do injustice to no one."\textsuperscript{15} The righteous man does all that the law demands without coercion. On the other hand, non-Christians are in the kingdom of the world and, in Luther's phrase, under both the sword and the law. They are under a different government, that of the state, which has a monopoly on the use of coercion. The church cannot lawfully use force, for it rules over a spiritual kingdom, using persuasion alone. Luther further commented that one cannot rule the world by means of the gospel, putting aside secular law and the sword for persuasion, as the Anabaptists would have it, for the "masses are and always will be un-Christian."\textsuperscript{16} The

\textsuperscript{13} Consequently Luther rejected canon law with characteristic bluntness: "The whole canon law would have to be demolished" (Luther's Works, 44:176; cf. 44:179 for similar remarks).

\textsuperscript{14} Martin Luther, Temporal Authority, in Luther's Works, 45:79-129.

\textsuperscript{15} Luther's Works, 45:89.

\textsuperscript{16} Luther's Works, 45:91.
Christian, while not himself requiring external governance, is subject to secular authority out of a concern for "what is serviceable and of benefit to others."\textsuperscript{17} A necessary corollary to this denial of the jurisdictional authority of the church was Luther's implicit elevation of the importance of the temporal ruler \textit{vis-à-vis} that of the clergy.\textsuperscript{18} The state and service to the state were exalted by Luther as avenues of godly service while the institutional church was limited in its influence to the arena of spiritual interests.

\textbf{Luther on Obedience}

The implications of the above ideas were, for Luther, inescapable; and he set them forth most clearly in his tract entitled \textit{Temporal Authority}. He began by affirming a straight-forward doctrine of passive obedience. Using Romans 13 and I Peter 2, he argued that secular government is ordained by God for the punishment of the wicked and the

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Luther's Works}, 45:94.

\textsuperscript{18} Skinner, 2:14-5; Oakley, 170-1. This view is somewhat ironic considering Luther's pessimistic view of princes: "You must know that since the beginning of the world a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore, one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters which concern the salvation of souls" (\textit{Luther's Works}, 45:113).
protection of the upright. Since secular rulers hold office by the will of God, "their enactments must be treated as a direct gift and expression of God's providence." The Christian is bound to obey his ruler as evidence of his submission, not so much to the ruler as, to God. Luther and his followers strengthened this teaching of obedience to authority as a result of the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 in order to distance themselves and the Reformation from the advocacy of armed rebellion.

The first principle led directly to a second one, that of disobedience. Simply put, an ungodly command by one's prince must not be obeyed. Contrary to what may seem to be the implication of Luther's focus on obedience to constituted authority, Luther in no way granted absolute authority to secular governments. In fact, Luther stated that his purpose in writing this tract was to curb the overweening ambition of certain German princes who "actually think they can do -- and order their subjects to do -- whatever they please." Outrage is not to be

19 Luther's Works, 45:85-6.
20 Skinner, 2:15.
21 Allen, 16-7. Cf. Luther's Admonition to Peace (1524) and his infamous Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants (1525).
23 Luther's Works, 45:83.
sanctioned by obedience; instead, one is bound to disobey a direct command to do evil, for not to do so is to deny God.\textsuperscript{24} Luther's retort is memorable: "What if a prince is in the wrong? Are his people bound to follow him then too? Answer: No, for it is no one's duty to do wrong; we must obey God (who desires the right) rather than men [Acts 5:29]."\textsuperscript{25} Skinner is, thus, correct in asserting that Luther established "a decisive limit on the general duty of political obedience."\textsuperscript{26} While the sinful commands of such a tyrant are to be disobeyed, the Christian is also bound to suffer willingly and gladly the punishment due for his disobedience.\textsuperscript{27}

Third, the combination of Luther's emphasis on obedience to princes and his idea of disobedience to sinful commands, implies non-resistance. While a direct command to sin by doing evil must be disobeyed, a prince must never be actively resisted by force of arms. Luther was unequivocal at this point:

To act here as a Christian, I say, a prince should not go to war against his overlord -- king, emperor or other liege lord -- but let him who takes, take. For the governing authority must not be resisted by force,

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Luther's Works}, 45:112.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Luther's Works}, 45:125. The immediate subject Luther was addressing is whether a Christian ought to follow his prince in going to war for an unjust cause.

\textsuperscript{26} Skinner, 2:17.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Luther's Works}, 45:112.
but only by confession of the truth. If it is influenced by this, well and good; if not, you are excused, you suffer wrong for God's sake. 28

To resist a tyrant by force is, in effect, to resist God himself, for all authority is ordained by God and exists by His decree. Therefore, it is one thing to disobey one's prince and an entirely different thing to use force against him. To disobey and suffer the consequences shows that one is willing to stand up for principle and be persecuted. To disobey and rebel demonstrates a lack of faith in God and a confusion of the two realms.

The importance of Luther's political ideas, especially his notion of non-resistance, lies in their originality and their impact. Indeed, his political thought represents a major deviation from recent medieval tradition. As W. D. J. Cargill Thompson notes:

The emphasis on non-resistance and the divine right of temporal authority involved the rejection of papal claims to be the ultimate source of all secular authority, as well as the rejection of the late medieval doctrine that tyrants might lawfully be resisted, since a ruler who became a tyrant ipso facto forfeited his authority. 29

Luther, indeed, rejected the notions of late medieval political writers such as John of Salisbury (d. 1180), Thomas Aquinas (1225?-74), and William of Ockham (1300?-49)

28 Luther's Works, 45:124-5. For similar arguments by Luther almost a decade later against armed resistance see his letter to Elector John of Saxony of March 6, 1530, in Luther's Works, 49:272-80.

29 Cargill Thompson, Political Thought of Luther, 8.
who had argued, following Aristotle, that a tyrant has no legitimate claim to rule and can be deposed. In addition, Luther's doctrines of obedience and non-resistance had a profound effect upon European history, especially in England, where they became, with some modification, the orthodox political point of view under the Tudors and Stuarts.

**English Lutherans and Obedience**

Protestant ideas were initially propagated in England by men who had imbibed Luther's ideas. The existence of a substantial and widespread Lollard movement in England created a climate particularly prepared for Luther's anti-Catholic ideas. On the other hand, English humanism had

---


been particularly critical of the church, providing another link with Luther's criticisms.\textsuperscript{32} The initial reaction of Henry VIII and his coterie to the Reformation was predictable: they rejected Luther's ideas out of hand. Henry's qualms of conscience over his marriage to Catherine, however, and his desire for a male heir to the throne initiated a sequence of events with entirely unexpected results: a formal break with Rome and the establishment of a tacit Protestant church in England under the domination of the crown.\textsuperscript{33}

English political thought of the era developed primarily along two lines. The early English Protestants articulated political ideas that relied heavily upon Luther's works, especially in their reiteration of the need to keep separate the spiritual and temporal realms.\textsuperscript{34} The leading English Lutheran converts in the 1520s and early 1530s who expressed these concepts were William Tyndale

\textsuperscript{32} See James Kelsey McConica, \textit{English Humanists and Reformation Politics Under Henry VIII and Edward VI} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), for an examination of the place of humanism in the English Reformation and the role played by individual humanists in furthering the Reformation.

\textsuperscript{33} William A. Clebsch writes: "After 1535 a national church was concentrated in the Crown as its head, accepting mildly Protestant principles for reasons of politics that were variously understood by Thomas Cromwell and Stephen Gardiner" (William A. Clebsch, \textit{England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535} [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964], 2).

\textsuperscript{34} Oakley, 177.
(1492-1536) and Robert Barnes (1495?-1540), both of whom spent time studying with Luther at Wittenberg. Lesser English Lutheran writers who wrote on political topics include William Roy (fl. 1527), Jerome Barlowe, and Simon Fish (d. 1531). Second, there were the official royal propagandists dedicated to defending and expanding the prerogatives of the crown, including its control over spiritual matters. The former group will be assessed forthwith, and the later group will be considered in a subsequent chapter.

William Tyndale

One of the most gifted of the early English Protestants was William Tyndale, who is known primarily for his translation of the New Testament and much of the Old Testament into English. Tyndale was graduated Master of

---

35 For a fine analysis of the writings of the English Lutherans and other early English Protestants see Clebsch. For Tyndale's life and works see pp. 137-204; for Barnes see pp. 42-77.

36 Clebsch refers to these men as members of the "outer circle of early English Protestant writers" (p. 229), being men of lesser abilities than Barnes and Tyndale or, for that matter, than either John Frith or George Joye. The works of Roy, Barlowe, and Fish emphasized religious and political ideas which are similar to Luther's. Fish's The summe of the holye Scripture (1529), for example, was a free translation from a Dutch original, with a "literal translation" of the part of Luther's Temporal Authority that deals with the two realms included for good measure. See Clebsch, 229-51, for a discussion of the works of Roy, Barlowe, and Fish.
Arts from Oxford in 1515, and, after moving to Cambridge in 1518 and spending a few years there, he became tutor to the children of Sir John Walsh in Gloucestershire around 1522. The following year he was accused of heresy and attempted unsuccessfully to gain the patronage of the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Turnstall. The merchant Humphrey Monmouth did lend assistance, and Tyndale, for a short time, lived in London and worked on his translation of the New Testament. In May 1524 he moved to Hamburg, and from thence to Wittenberg to visit and study with Luther, possibly matriculating at Wittenberg. By August 1525 he was in residence at Cologne, attempting to publish his New Testament. The intervention of Catholic authorities led to his flight to Worms where, in March 1526, the New Testament was printed in English for the first time. Next Tyndale began working on translating the Old Testament, and by 1528 he was living in Antwerp where, on October 2, 1528, his most important original work, The Obedience of a Christen Man and how Christen rulers ought to governe (1528), was published.37

37 William Tyndale, The Obedience of a Christen Man, A facsimile reprint of the 1528 (Antwerp) edition (Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1977). The complete title is The Obedience of a Christen Man and how Christen rulers ought to governe/ where in also (yf thou marke diligently) thou shalt fynde eyes to perceve the crafty conveyaunce of all jugglers. This work can also be found in William Tyndale, Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures, ed. Henry Walter for the Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1848;
Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christen Man* was the most influential of the English Lutheran political tracts, and, not surprisingly, it reiterates much that Luther had written about obedience to kings and other rulers in his *Temporal Authority*. Like Luther, Tyndale urged subjects to obey their rulers, making this a solemn duty for the Christian to perform. He laid the foundation for his argument by discussing the obedience of children to their elders, wives to their husbands, and servants to their masters before addressing the issue of the obedience of subjects to kings, princes, and rulers. Tyndale argued that the fifth commandment, "honour thy father and thy mother," applies to submission to all those in authority, not just to parental authority. Tyndale's used many of the same reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 127-344.

The literary quality of Tyndale's work has frequently been commented on. Rupp, for instance, writes that "even where he borrowed or translated, what he wrote was coloured by his own rich feeling and expressed in prose which at times reached limpid purity unsurpassed in English literature" (R. G. Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949], 48). For similar estimations cf. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 191-2; and Clebsch, 200.

Exodus 20:12. Luther referred to this commandment as the fourth commandment.

Cf. Luther's Table Talk of December, 1532 where he stated: "It can be shown by proof that the magistracy is based on the Fourth Commandment. The reason is that obedience is necessary" (*Luther's Works*, 54:67).
arguments as Luther, relying heavily upon such scriptural passages as Romans 13, which he translated in full at the beginning of his discussion of the duty of obedience to rulers. The king, he argued, rules by divine appointment, ministering the sword against the evil doer. Tyndale, with characteristic confidence in the providence of God, wrote: "Heedes and governers are ordened off God and are even the gyft of God/ whether thei be good or bad. And what so ever is done vnto vs by them/ that doeth God/ be it good or bad." While emphasizing the responsibility of men for their actions before God, he did not hesitate to stress the all-inclusive nature of God's control.

Using Luther's division between the temporal and spiritual realms, Tyndale contended that "the kynge in the temporall regimente be in the rowme of God and representeth God him selfe & is without all comparison better then his subjectes." Tyndale's exaltation of the king owes much to the "widespread feeling that the king must have a freer

---

41 Tyndale, Obedience, fol. 45.

42 It may seem ironic that the same writers who urged calm reliance upon God's providence in the existence of secular rulers were so bitter in their attack upon spiritual rulers, especially the pope, whom Tyndale did not hesitate to call "that very Antechriste" (fol. 38). However, it was for their intrusion into the temporal realm that these spiritual rulers were being taken to task, and temporal rulers were not, at the time, actively interfering in the affairs of the church.

43 Tyndale, Obedience, fol. 52.
hand" over his realm in order "to do his public duty" without hindrance from the nobility.\textsuperscript{44} The obvious question at this point is, if the king rules at God's command, why does He permit evil princes to rule? Tyndale was quick with an answer. He argued that whereas good rulers are a sign of the approbation of God, "evyll rulers then are a signe that God is angry & wroth with vs."\textsuperscript{45} They are the rod and scourge that God uses to punish a wicked and rebellious people. Thus, an evil ruler is a punishment to be endured by obedience rather than a tyrant to be overthrown.

The emphasis on obedience by Tyndale was, in fact, even stronger than Luther's. He seems to place no external limits on the king at all. With reckless abandon he wrote that "the kinge is in this worlde without lawe & maye at his lust doo right or wronge and shall geve acomptes/ but to God only."\textsuperscript{46} Not only does the king give account to no one, but no one may judge the king's actions without thereby judging and questioning God. Tyndale remarked: "God hath made the kinge in every realme iudge over all/ and over him is there no iudge. He that iudgeth the kinge iudgeth God &


\textsuperscript{45} Tyndale, \textit{Obedience}, fol. 45.

\textsuperscript{46} Tyndale, \textit{Obedience}, fol. 33.
he that layeth hand on the kinge layeth hande on God." 47

If one's ruler violates God's law and sins, then one must wait for God to judge him, either by changing his heart or by directly removing him from office. Whether Tyndale meant to grant immunity to every action of the ruler is doubtful. Rather, this is merely an example of the unguarded language that Luther and his followers used when trying to deny secular power to the church. 48

Tyndale's emphatic declarations regarding obedience do not, however, include obeying a sinful command by one's ruler. This exception, while not stressed as fully as the duty of obedience, was nevertheless clear. Tyndale noted, with a quiet word of warning, that "yf they commaunde [us] to doo evell we must then disobey and saye we are other wise commaundet of God." 49 If the king does not relent then the Christian must be ready and willing "to sofre even the bitter deeth for his hopes sake and because he will doo no evyll." 50

47 Tyndale, Obedience, fol. 32.

48 Thus Dickens's description of Tyndale's Obedience of a Christen Man as "an unflinching exposition of the divine right of kings" (English Reformation, 97) is not merely an anachronism but an unfortunate oversimplification. For a similar attempt to paint both Tyndale and Barnes with the broad brush of the divine right of kings theory see John Neville Figgis, The Divine Right of Kings, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 93-4.

49 Tyndale, Obedience, fol. 152.

50 Tyndale, Obedience, fol. 152.
In the clearest possible manner Tyndale argued that active resistance against the king and those in authority is not permissible at all. Passive non-resistance is the clear directive. Tyndale wrote: "Nether maye the inferior person avenge himselfe apon the superior or violently resiste him for what so ever wronge it be. If he doo he is condemned in the dede doinge."\(^{51}\) When a subject forcibly resists secular authority, he is attempting to take revenge -- an act which God alone can perform. In effect, he is questioning the wisdom and providence of God. In addition, not only is such a person judging God, but "he that resisteth the kinge resisteth God and damneth Gods lawe and ordinaunce."\(^{52}\) In short, he is, in Tyndale's view, violating the clear commands of the Word of God.

In encouraging obedience even to tyrants, Tyndale went so far as to argue that a single tyrant is better than many tyrants, and a tyrant is better than a weak king or anarchy.\(^{53}\) After the Peasants Revolt in Germany, he, like Luther, remained "anxious to disprove that Protestants were political or social anarchists."\(^{54}\) This remark also appears to be a thinly veiled reference to the recent civil

---

\(^{51}\) Tyndale, *Obedience*, fol. 31.

\(^{52}\) Tyndale, *Obedience*, fol. 32.

\(^{53}\) Tyndale, *Obedience*, fol. 34.

\(^{54}\) Morris, 33.
wars and rebellion accompanying the Wars of the Roses between Lancastrians and Yorkists. C. S. Lewis, the Oxford literary critic, notes that "for Tyndale as for Shakespeare, the Wars of the Roses are an illustration drawn by the hand of God" of the importance of obedience to one's temporal sovereign.\textsuperscript{55}

It is also worth pausing to consider how Tyndale describes a tyrant. He wrote that "a tyraunte though he do wronge vnto the good/ yet he punessheth the evill & maketh all men obeye nether sofereth any man to polle but him selfe only."\textsuperscript{56} Thus, modern examples of tyrants, such as Hitler or Stalin, bear little relation to Tyndale's characterization. Instead, he viewed a tyrant of a more innocuous variety: a narrow minded ruler who thinks primarily of himself rather than the good of his people.

Robert Barnes

The second, and lesser, English Lutheran writer to be considered here is Robert Barnes. Barnes, like Luther, was

\textsuperscript{55} Lewis, 184. Cf. Rupp, 76-7 for a similar estimation. This appeal to history, and many other of Tyndale's arguments, would later be repeated in the homilies, An Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates (1547) and An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570); in Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571), 2 vols in one (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968).

\textsuperscript{56} Tyndale, \textit{Obedience}, fol. 34.
an Augustinian monk. He studied at Cambridge, and after an interlude of several years at Louvain, he was graduated Doctor of Divinity in 1523 from Cambridge. In February 1526 Barnes was examined by Cardinal Wolsey for heresy as a result of a sermon he had preached the previous Christmas Eve. Barnes was at this time no Lutheran; however, he recanted his position and was imprisoned. Over a year later, upon learning that he was to be burned at the stake, Barnes escaped to the Continent, arriving in Antwerp late in 1528. From thence he travelled to Wittenberg, lodging with Luther and studying with the Wittenberg theologians, eventually graduating from the university in June 1533.

While in exile Barnes began his career as a diplomat from Henry VIII to various German courts, proving himself a "loyal servant of his king." In September 1531 he involved himself in the attempt "to lead Henry VIII and the Wittenberg theologians into friendly communication." On his way to London he stopped in Antwerp long enough to have his work, A supplicatyon . . . vnto the most excellent and

---

57 Clebsch notes the irony inherent in the fact that Barnes was prematurely charged with teaching the heresy of Lutheranism in 1525 when, in reality, he only did so after his visit to Wittenberg. See Clebsch, 43, 44-9.

58 Rupp, 43.

59 Clebsch, 51.
redoubted prince kinge Henrve the eyght (1531), printed. 60
This work alone did not, however, obtain him the preferment he eagerly sought from Henry.

Barnes's Supplicatyon, while a lesser work than Tyndale's, was important for its expression of an essentially Lutheran conception of theology and politics. Central to his discussion was the stress he laid upon Luther's distinction between the temporal and spiritual powers and "their respective systems of governance." 61 In fact, much of what Barnes had to say centers on the abuse of power by those in the spiritual realm by attempting to rule in the temporal realm.

Barnes, after noting the division between the two

60 Robert Barnes, A Supplicatyon . . . unto Henry VIII, A facsimile reprint of the 1534? (n.p.) edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973). The complete title is A supplicatyon made by Robert Barnes doctoure of diuinite vnto the most excellent and redoubted prince kinge henrye the eyght. This is actually a reprint of the 1531 edition which includes, as part six, the important Mennes constitucions which be not grounded in Scipture binde not the conscience of man ynder payne of deedlye sinne. Men's Constitutions was subsequently published as a separate pamphlet in 1532 and left out of the 1534 edition of the Supplicatyon. The title for the 1534 edition was revised to A supplicacion vnto the most gracious prince H. the .viii.. On the many differences between the 1531 and 1534 editions of the Supplicatyon see Clebsch, 58-73, who examines the implications for changes in Barnes's theology; and W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, "The Sixteenth-Century Editions of A Supplication unto King Henry the Eighth by Robert Barnes, D.D.: A Footnote to the History of the Royal Supremacy," Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society 3 (1960): 133-42, who details the changes in Barnes's political thought to a position more sympathetic to royal supremacy.

61 Oakley, 176.
powers, stated that "the temporalle power ys commytted of
god to kynges/ Dukes/ Erlys/ Lordes/ Barrons/ Iudges/
mayrys/ shryuys/ and to alle other mynystres vnder them/
these be they that haue wonly the temporalle swerde."  
Like Tyndale and Luther, he based his remarks on the
thirteenth chapter of Romans, emphasizing that all those in
authority rule by God's permission. Barnes had clear advice
for those who wish to know how to respond as a Christian to
a tyrannical ruler. He argued that Christians are bound to
obey even a tyrant. When the temporal authority commands
that which is hurtful or wrong, provided it is not contrary
to God's Word, then "either we must do the thyng that is
commanded vs or els flye."  
Obedience or exile are the
only two options open when the king gives a command.

But what if the king does command that which is
contrary to God's Word? Barnes carefully considered whether
the king should be obeyed in all things. The particular
issue that concerned him was that of the confiscation and
burning of Scripture. He wrote with conviction that men
should not deny Christ's Word or "graunte to the burnynge of
their testamentes/ but if the kynge wille do it bi violence
they mvst suffer it/ but not obey to it by a grement." 

62 Barnes, fol. 113.
63 Barnes, fol. 118.
64 Barnes, fol. 116.
In essence, the king, by such an action, is violating the distinction between the two realms and is interfering in spiritual matters.\textsuperscript{65} To Barnes this distinction between sinful obedience and passive disobedience was very clear, for he wrote: "Christen men are bound to obey in sufferyng the kynges tyranny/ but not in consentyng to hys vn lawfull commandiment."\textsuperscript{66} When the king or his minister commands anything against God's Word, the Christian must disobey and suffer the consequences, such as persecution, loss of property, or even death.

When it came to the issue of armed resistance Barnes, not surprisingly, categorically denied the possibility. His words do not admit ambivalence, for he wrote: "Now is it clear made that we can not resyst this temporalle power in no wysse by vyolence."\textsuperscript{67} Barnes set up a paradigm to be followed in case the king forbids the New Testament or in any other way violates God's Word. The first response should be that of prayer to Almighty God. If there is no apparent change, then one should either flee peacefully or disobey non-violently. A command that is profitable to the commonwealth, however, must be obeyed; one cannot flee. After noting this duty to disobey a sinful command, Barnes

\textsuperscript{65} Oakley, 176.

\textsuperscript{66} Barnes, fol. 117.

\textsuperscript{67} Barnes, fol. 118.
argued that the Christian may not in any way forcibly resist. He wrote:

Lett the kyng exercysse his tyranny (if they can not flye) and in no wisse vnder the payne of damnacion shalle they withstonde hym with violence but suffer paciently alle the tyranny that he layth on them bothe in theyr boddys and goodes/ and leue the vengance of it vn to their heuynly father which hathe a scorge to tame those bedlams with whane he seyth his tyme. But in no wisse shalle they resyste violentlye.68

Clearly passive non-resistance, and a calm acceptance of the consequences of disobedience, is as far as Barnes would take resistance.

Conclusion

In 1529 Anne Boleyn persuaded Henry to read Tyndale's Obedience of a Christen Man. Henry, upon completing his reading of the work, remarked: "This is a book for me and all kings to read."69 Despite his abhorrence of Tyndale's Protestant principles, Henry could easily see the value in his teaching of obedience to the crown and in his attack upon the authority of the pope.70 Tyndale had struck upon

68 Barnes, fol. 115.


70 For the implications of the latter see Skinner, 2:72-3.
precisely the formula Henry needed: the rejection of the supreme authority of the pope within the church and the assertion of the supreme authority of the king within the state. Within two years Thomas Cromwell (1485?-1540) was actively looking for allies and propagandists who would support Henry in the "king's great matter": his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. This search included overtures to Tyndale, Barnes, and other Protestants, whose political views he sought to exploit.  

Tyndale, however, roundly condemned the divorce in his Practice of Prelates, and Henry lost interest in soliciting his help. Tyndale was subsequently burned at the stake for heresy by imperial authorities in Vilvorde in 1536, and the following year the king officially sanctioned the publishing of an English translation of the Bible.

The largely Lutheran position taken by Tyndale and Barnes was, for the most part, an intermediary position. Attempts were made to draw both men into the royal supremacy.

---


camp. Barnes needed no help, for he actively sought royal favor, even going so far as to tone down subsequent editions of his *Supplication* in order to curry favor with Henry. While Henry did favor Barnes enough to grant him the status of royal chaplain in 1535, his diplomatic missions to the various German courts during the 1530s were not successful enough to secure further advancement. Luther was wary of Henry and refused to support Henry's divorce. More costly, however, was Barnes's role in arranging the king's marriage to Anne of Cleeves, for her downfall resulted in the same for those who had played a part in that event. Consequently, Barnes was condemned by Act of Attainder and burned at the stake in 1540, ostensibly as a Lutheran heretic under the Six Articles Act. Luther was not alone in attributing "Saint Robert's" untimely demise to his involvement in Henry's marriage with Anne and his opposition to the subsequent divorce. In the words of James Gairdner, Barnes "died a victim to that royal supremacy which he had done his best to promote."  

---

73 Barnes's inability to secure a good position appears to have been also rooted in the personal animosity of Henry and, to some degree, Stephen Gardiner. Rupp writes: "At last [in 1538] through the good offices of William Barlow he [Barnes] was rewarded with a miserable Welsh prebend to the value £18 a year. The truth seems to be that Henry greatly disliked him and that [Thomas] Cromwell durst not advance one whom the King delighted not to honour" (Rupp, 43).

Subsequent to this loss of a distinctly Lutheran view, the defense of obedience was left to the hands of those closer to the throne. Nevertheless, Henry's defenders did not neglect the English Lutheran works, especially Tyndale's writings. Lutheran arguments, including their very phrases, soon appeared in defense of the king's supremacy not only in the state, but also in the English church.
CHAPTER II

ROYAL SUPREMACY AND THE NECESSITY OF OBEDIENCE, 1531-1547

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well (I Peter 2:13-14).¹

Subsequent to the development of English Lutheranism, and roughly contemporaneous to its waning as a distinct movement, political thought in England was articulated most notably by those close to the government and the Henrician Reformation. Under Henry men such as Richard Sampson (d. 1554), Edward Fox (1496?-1538), Stephen Gardiner (1493?-1555), and Thomas Starkey (1499?-1538) were, for various reasons, dedicated "ideologists of royal supremacy."² These royal propagandists sought to defend and expand the prerogatives of the king, including his control over the administration of the church. Like the English Lutheran theorists who preceded them, the defenders of royal supremacy sought, in the words of Christopher Morris,

¹ All Scripture references are from the King James Version.

to prove that the true church cannot use force, . . . that the Pope has usurped powers which properly belong to the civil ruler, that in so far as law and coercion are needed in the Christian life they must be wielded by the prince alone.3

Thus, they carried forward the emphasis on obedience to the crown which William Tyndale and Robert Barnes had already articulated. And whereas the Lutheran position was somewhat short lived as a distinct view, the royalist position continued to attract defenders well into the seventeenth century, carrying forward the doctrine of obedience in English political thought.

The Divorce and Royal Supremacy

The road to royal supremacy appears, in retrospect, to have been an unusually precipitous one for Henry VIII (r. 1509-47) and his ministers. His inability to obtain a divorce from the pope ultimately led to his break with the Catholic church and his claim to be supreme head of the English church. Soon thereafter, a propaganda effort was initiated by Thomas Cromwell (1485?-1540) to defend, both at home and abroad, the king's actions.4 Several important


writers took up this theme, and for their efforts they expected and received royal preferment.\textsuperscript{5}

In 1527 Henry began seeking an annulment of his marriage to Catharine of Aragon (1485-1536); however, a quick resolution to the "king's great matter" was not forthcoming, despite the prodigious efforts of Henry's chief minister, Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey (1471-1530), who simultaneously held the offices in the Catholic church of cardinal and papal legate. Pope Clement VII (r. 1523-1534), for his part, could not risk offending the powerful nephew of Catherine, Charles V of Spain (r. 1516-1556), so he stalled negotiations. After two years Henry grew impatient, especially with Wolsey, whom he blamed for the delays.\textsuperscript{6} He moved, albeit haltingly, to dismiss Wolsey, and chose Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) to replace Wolsey as chancellor.

These events led Henry to pursue more extreme measures in order to get his own way. In November 1529 Henry called a new Parliament into session, the "Reformation Parliament," which served him faithfully for seven years. He also appealed, at the suggestion of Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556),


to the universities for their opinion regarding the divorce. The following year Henry began his attack upon the Catholic church in England by indicting the entire English clergy of praemunire. While he subsequently agreed to grant a pardon to them, this was a devastating blow to the clergy, for "they had broken the king's law by the very use of their spiritual jurisdiction." More important, Henry soon demanded that the clergy accept his new title of "protector and only supreme head of the English Church." This they also agreed to in Convocation, qualifying it in some measure by adding the phrase "as far as the law of Christ allows."

From 1532 on, Cromwell appears to have given Henry's actions a definite purpose: to remove the English church

---


8 Praemunire, the offense of appealing to or obeying papal authority in England, was based on Henry's twisted application of the statute of 1393. He had already successfully used it to indict Wolsey for simply being a papal legate. The English clergy were, in turn, implicated for participating in his crime.


10 Elton, Tudor Constitution, 330; Scarisbrick, 275-6.
from the jurisdiction of the pope and place it under the control of the crown.\textsuperscript{11} In 1532 and 1533 Henry gained control over canon law\textsuperscript{12} and the appointment of archbishops and bishops,\textsuperscript{13} restrained the payment of annates to the pope,\textsuperscript{14} and forbade appeals to the papal court.\textsuperscript{15} The last was especially significant, for by January 1533 the difficulty of the pope's intransigence was compounded by the fact that Anne Boleyn was pregnant. On 23 May 1533 Thomas Cranmer, the new archbishop of Canterbury and ally of Cromwell, and his court, now the supreme ecclesiastical court acknowledged in England, granted Henry an annulment. At last Henry was free to marry Anne, and there was to be no turning back. The following year Henry formalized his break with Rome when Parliament declared him to be "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of

\textsuperscript{11} For Cromwell's rise to power within Henry's government see G. R. Elton, The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 71-98. For evidence that by the 1532 session of Parliament Cromwell was making policy see pp. 93-8.

\textsuperscript{12} Granted in the Submission of the Clergy (1532) and confirmed in 1534 in 25 Henry VIII, c. 19. Elton, Tudor Constitution, 331. This act of Parliament and all acts referred to below are reproduced, at least in part, in Elton, Tudor Constitution.

\textsuperscript{13} 23 Henry VIII, c. 20.

\textsuperscript{14} 23 Henry VIII, c. 20.

\textsuperscript{15} 24 Henry VIII, c. 12.
The Defense of the King

It was precisely these events that gave rise to the need for capable defenders of the king's actions. While J. J. Scarisbrick is correct in pointing out the fact that the struggle for the divorce and the movement toward royal supremacy in the church were logically distinct, they were nevertheless interrelated to the extent that both required defending and that many of the arguments for the Henrician Reformation applied equally to a rejection of papal authority to determine the validity of Henry's marriage. The issue of the divorce thus played a crucial role in introducing and exploiting the anti-papal element in royal supremacy. Moreover, it is precisely the combination of these characteristics that gave Henry and England their own unique variety of caesaropapism.

Obedience and Royal Supremacy

16 26 Henry VIII, c. 1.

17 The focus of the present chapter is a narrow one: to highlight the emphasis on obedience in the writings of the royalist party. For helpful surveys of the fuller range of their political thought consult Oakley, 177-82; Skinner, 89-108; Morris, 48-67; and J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London: Methuen, 1928), 157-68.

18 Scarisbrick, 248, 287.
Cromwell, ever the capable principal minister, procured the services of skilled defenders of both the divorce and royal supremacy. In 1531 he turned to Tyndale but was disappointed. As was shown in the previous chapter, the very man who had so eloquently counselled complete obedience to the king ignored his own advice and rebuked Henry for seeking a divorce. Barnes's scruples were, however, more easily overcome, and by 1534 he had produced a newly revised edition of his Supplicatyon that had been adjusted to the "new situation created by the abolition of papal jurisdiction and the establishment of the Royal Supremacy." Further, Barnes's new edition was a harbinger of things to come, for in it the "doctrine of non-resistance received even greater prominence than before."  

This was, in short, one of the chief characteristics of royal supremacy propaganda: a heightened insistence upon abject obedience to the crown. Obedience, in their hands, received an even greater stress than it had in any of the Lutheran writers, writing as they did prior to the Henrician Reformation. Obviously neither the king's divorce nor his

---


actions in the church were or could be questioned by his own defenders. In addition, while acknowledging the tentative possibility that the king might command that which is contrary to God's Word, a command which they agreed must not be obeyed, they quickly dismissed such an eventuality out of hand. Thus the twin Lutheran emphases of obedience and non-resistance were reduced merely to one: obedience to the king.

This evolution can perhaps best be understood by relating Sir Thomas More's reaction to Tyndale's Obedience of a Christian Man. More argued in his Dialogue Concerning Tyndale (1529) that Tyndale, following Luther, called the divinely ordained authority of "popes, princes, and other governers" tyranny, and, furthermore, he wrote that according to Tyndale the "people be so free by faith that they are no more bounden thereto than they be bounden to suffer wrong." In the words of Quentin Skinner, More "fixed on this insistence that an evil command must never be obeyed, and went on to declare that Tyndale in 'his holy book of disobedience' was arguing in favour of treason and rebellion." Thus, while the Lutheran doctrine of obedience was a teaching whose value could be readily

22 Skinner, 2:70.
perceived by those close to the king, the insistence that immoral commands must be disobeyed yet not resisted violently was not nearly so appealing, for it could be construed, albeit somewhat absurdly, as an open invitation to sedition.

The first defenders of the divorce and royal supremacy, Sampson, Fox, and Gardiner, wrote their treatises in Latin. They defended Henry's actions before the learned men of both England and the Continent, but especially before the English clergy. Later works, such as The King's Book and the writings of Starkey, were composed in English since these were intended for popular consumption. All, however, anticipated attracting royal favor and preferment. While these writers may have overstated their opinions regarding royal supremacy and the divorce, their emphasis on obedience required no such qualification. Obedience to and justification of the new situation was clearly necessary if Henry was to be able to continue to pursue these policies.

Richard Sampson

The first defender of royal supremacy and obedience to the crown was Richard Sampson. Sampson studied at Cambridge, Paris, and Sens, before becoming a doctor of

23 Elton, Policy and Police, 182.

civil law. In 1513, through Wolsey's help, he embarked upon an impressive career within the church and within the administration of Henry's government, with important positions being granted to him at a rapid rate, beginning with his appointment as dean of Chapel Royal and king's chaplain in 1516. From October 1522 to October 1525 Sampson was ambassador to the emperor's court, and upon his return to England he received further preferments within the church. He took an active part in the divorce proceedings, travelling in 1529 to visit both pope and emperor and giving his views about the divorce before Parliament in 1530. In 1533 he wrote his Latin Oratio qua docet Anglos regiae dignitati ut obediant (An Oration Teaching Obedience) which was published in London the following year. Soon afterwards Sampson received a major promotion, being elevated to the office of bishop of Chichester on 11 June 1536.\textsuperscript{25} Several years later he was made bishop of Coventry and Lichfield on 19 February 1542.\textsuperscript{26}

Sampson wrote his \textit{Oration} of 1534 in Latin, yet it was never translated into English. It was the first of the

\textsuperscript{25} For the assertion that Sampson's election to the see of Chichester was connected to his defence of Henry's actions see Elton, \textit{Policy and Police}, 182. Cf. Skinner, 2:94.

\textsuperscript{26} For this short summary of Sampson's life and subsequent sketches of the other authors in this chapter, material has largely been drawn from the \textit{Dictionary of National Biography}, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885-1901).
tracts written to defend supporting the two issues that were becoming inseparable: divorce and royal supremacy. While more cautious than other works that followed, the *Oration* was, nonetheless, a clear call to obedience to the king. In fact, Sampson made his aim as clear as possible in choosing the subtitle, for it stated that the purpose of the work is "to teach everyone that they must be obedient to the will of the King." Sampson's argument was simple. All men are required to love God, and those who do so keep His commandments, including obedience to the king in all things not against God's will. Since the king has rejected the pope's authority, so must his subjects.

The conservative nature of Sampson's beliefs was attested to by the fact that he was able to keep his bishopric under both a Protestant monarch, Edward, and a Catholic monarch, Mary. While this feat may at first seem surprising, it was precisely his views on the importance of obedience to the crown that made such vacillation in doctrine and practice possible.

**Edward Fox**

The next major defender of royal supremacy and

---

27 Skinner, 2:94.

28 Skinner, 2:94.

obedience was Edward Fox. Fox was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, maintaining close ties to the university throughout his career. Fairly early on in his career Fox benefitted from the patronage of Wolsey, even receiving the appointment as his secretary. In 1528 Fox and Gardiner went to Rome to present legal arguments to the pope for Henry's divorce. Beginning in 1529 he travelled to Cambridge, Oxford, and Paris to argue for and return with favorable opinions from the universities regarding the divorce. From 1532 to 1534 he played an important role in the divorce proceedings, even travelling to Germany to attempt to convince leading Lutheran theologians to support Henry's divorce.\(^\text{30}\) In 1534 he published his Latin defense of the divorce and royal supremacy, \textit{De vera differentia reiae potestatis et ecclesiasticae}, which was translated into English during the reign of Edward as \textit{The True Dyfferens Between ye Regall Power and the Ecclesiasticall Power} (1548).\(^\text{31}\) Fox received many preferments for his efforts, and, following the publication of his \textit{True Dyfferens}, he was elected bishop of Hereford in August of 1535.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Robert Barnes was in Wittenberg at the time on a similar errand for Henry.


\(^{32}\) Again suggested by Elton, \textit{Policy and Police}, 182.
In the True Differens Fox explained what he considered the proper difference between regal and ecclesiastical power to be and was clearly committed to enhancing the former and limiting the latter. He argued that the power claimed for the church, especially by the pope, is "vsurped nowe adayes," and not only that, but it "partayneth proprely vnto kinges." For example, he contended that the exemption of clerics from secular justice and their reservation for trial in church courts according to canon law is "daungerous." His work was, in fact, more stridently anti-papal than Sampson's Oration.

In arguing these and other points Fox relied heavily upon a call to obedience. Fox stressed the divine ordination of kings and the great power granted to them by God. From this fact, and the many Biblical examples he referred to, he drew the expected corollary regarding obedience to the king: "all the comens and rulers are obedient to him." Moreover, lest anyone should miss the moral of his lesson, Fox made it clear that this obedience includes the church, for he wrote: "Then there as the hie

33 Fox, fol. 6.
34 Fox, fol. 40.
35 Oakley, 178; Skinner, 2:94.
36 Fox, fols. 55-58.
37 Fox, fol. 58.
bisshoppes did cal the kinges there lordes & them selfes the kinges seruannts it maye wel be gathered that kinges be superiours to the bisshoppes, & that the bysshops ought to be subiecte to kinges."

This theme of obedience to princely authority was reiterated throughout. In more than one place Fox, like Tyndale and Barnes, quoted from the thirteenth chapter of Romans to make his point. This passage, he explained, confirms that God "byddeth all men to be obedient" to the "regall and ciuell power" and that He "excepteth no man at all" from this obedience, "nether Peter nor Paule no preest no bysshoppe no Cardinal, no patriarke no Pope." Moreover, any one who violates this clear commandment of God will receive damnation as the just punishment for his contumacy.

These are strong words indeed, and Fox did not moderate his emphasis on obedience nearly as much as did the Lutheran writers with their insistence upon the moral duty of disobedience and non-resistance to an evil command. Admittedly he does in one place qualify obedience to civil authority in that he predicated obedience upon the fact that the king commands "nothinge contrari to god." And in

---

38 Fox, fols. 59-60.

39 Fox, fol. 68.

40 Fox, fol. 69.
another place he reminded the reader of the example of the evil law of Nebuchadnezzar which required men to honor an idol, "but they that wold not obey his wicked and vngodly constitucion dyed godly & faythfully." These appear to be minor qualifications, however, which do not counter the whole tenor of Fox's work with its emphasis on obedience to the new order. So while Fox must admit the ethical possibility that a king might command something evil, he nowhere admitted that any of Henry's actions could be considered immoral. On the contrary, his understanding of the difference between regal and ecclesiastical power was designed to justify Henry's intrusions upon the authority of the church, not to permit disobedience to the new situation.

An example of one such intrusion that needed careful justification was the question of adiaphora or things indifferent to salvation. Fox went beyond Lutherans such as Barnes in urging obedience to the crown in things indifferent. Barnes had argued that the church can only require that which Scripture plainly teaches and that if bishops make rules on indifferent things they violate the Christian's liberty in Christ and cause him to sin if he obeys, so such rules are not to be obeyed. Fox agreed

41 Fox, fol. 73.

with such reasoning, and even echoes Barnes's phraseology, as far as it goes: the rejection of the pope's authority. Fox contended, however, that the king has the authority to reform those things within the church that are of mere human invention and which "be yll abused." Further he argued that reforming the church is the king's sacred duty, for "the churche of god was commytted by Christ to the princes or lorde that they shulde saue and defende it." Clearly such a reformation entailed imposing such changes upon the clergy and laity who would be bound by the new rules made at the king's insistence and assent.

**Stephen Gardiner**

Stephen Gardiner, the noted Bishop of Winchester, received his education at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, before becoming both a doctor of civil law and a doctor of canon law in 1520 and 1521 respectively. Soon thereafter Wolsey became his patron, and in 1528 he travelled with Fox to Rome as ambassador to the pope to urge the legitimacy of the divorce. For this and other efforts Gardiner received many rapid preferments. The following year he made another trip to Rome, and upon his return he was appointed secretary to

---

43 Fox, fols. 36, 37.
44 Fox, fol. 61.
45 Fox, fol. 76.
the king, and in November 1531 he received the bishopric of Winchester. Gardiner vacillated considerably on the questions of royal supremacy and the divorce, angering the king in 1532 for his defense at both Convocation and Parliament of the right of bishops to enact canon law without royal consent. He was, however, soon restored to favor. Later, after resigning his secretaryship in April 1534, he was required to return to court and appears to have been in fear of losing his life. In the midst of these murky circumstances Gardiner reversed his opposition to the king, renounced papal authority, and wrote his Latin oration, De vera obedientia. This work was published in 1535 and later translated into English in 1553 under the title The Oration of True Obedience. This work includes a strident attack upon papal authority and defense of royal supremacy which was endorsed by Martin Bucer (1491-1551), the Swiss reformer. Gardiner remained, however, opposed to the doctrines of the Reformation and to many of its adherents in England, such as Barnes, Cranmer, and Cromwell.


47 Stephen Gardiner, The Oration of True Obedience, in Gardiner, Obedience in Church and State, 67-171. This edition reprints the Latin original and the sixteenth-century translation side by side. It also contains two previously unpublished works by Gardiner: his tract on John Fisher's execution and his answer to Martin Bucer.
During Edward's reign, he was imprisoned in the Tower of London for several years and deprived of his bishopric. Nevertheless, under Mary he returned to royal favor and played a leading role in the return to Roman Catholicism.

Gardiner's *True Obedience* is an eloquent defense of both the divorce and royal supremacy and is in many ways the clearest and most vigorous argument written in support of these propositions.\(^{48}\) The divorce from Catherine, for example, was explicitly endorsed as the ending of an "vnlawful marriage."\(^{49}\) In addition, the right of Henry to "call himself supreme headde of the church of Englande" was affirmed by Gardiner at length.\(^{50}\)

According to Gardiner true obedience requires one to submit to God and "neuer to refuse the autoritie of God / and to obey bothe him and al them / whom God commaundeth him to obey for his sake."\(^{51}\) Gardiner did not hesitate to refer to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 to justify implicit obedience to authority. In addition, Gardiner repeatedly employed exalted titles to refer to kings. In one passage kings are said to be "representours of his [God's] Image vnto men," to be in the "supreme / and most highe / rowme,"


\(^{49}\) Gardiner, *True Obedience*, 87.

\(^{50}\) Gardiner, *True Obedience*, 91-7, 115-21.

\(^{51}\) Gardiner, *True Obedience*, 87.
and to excell all men.\textsuperscript{52} Later the king is described as "Goddes lieftenaunt" who represents the "ymage of God upon the earthe."\textsuperscript{53} More examples could be adduced; however, these show sufficiently that Gardiner was never at a loss for ways to stroke Henry's pride by extolling his power and position.

These arguments have another purpose as well. By proving that Henry's authority was so great that it was above the pope's, he could then require Henry's subjects to obey the king rather than pope. Herein lay the importance of Henry's claim to be supreme head of the Church of England, for by such a claim he could bypass any possibility of an appeal to the authority of Rome. Consequently, Gardiner reduced the medieval two swords doctrine of both Pope Gelasius (r. 492-6) and the papal revolution (1075-1122), wherein the secular and spiritual powers were defined and each was limited to its own sphere of authority, to a single sword to be wielded by the king, and he upset the theoretical balance of power between the authority of the church and the authority of the king in Henry's favor.

Gardiner returned to the question of obedience with vigor: "For who euer denied / that the prince ought to be obeyed? it is most certayn / that he that will not obeye

\textsuperscript{52} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 89.

\textsuperscript{53} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 97.
the Prince / is worthy to dye for it."\textsuperscript{54} He did not shy away from the logical question this affirmation elicits, but pondered openly "how ferre the limites of requiring obedience extende."\textsuperscript{55} To this he gave an unequivocal answer. He wrote: "What maner of limites are those / that ye tel me of seing the scripture hathe non suche?"\textsuperscript{56} Lest anyone miss the point he reiterated this several times including this straightforward and bold assertion: "The sentences / that commaunde obedience / are indiffinitie / or without excepcion / but are of indifferent force universally."\textsuperscript{57} Thus, any unwillingness to obey Henry involves not only the crime of treason against the king but the sin of rebellion against God.

It is not surprising that Gardiner should so emphasize obedience in a treatise dedicated to defending the king's actions. While he later stated that he wrote the work under duress, there is little doubt that, at least on this issue, it fairly represents his views.\textsuperscript{58} This was, for example, exactly how he explained to Pope Paul III (r. 1534-49)

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Gardiner, \textit{True Obedience}, 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} For this assertion see A. G. Dickens, \textit{The English Reformation}, 2d ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1989), 198. For a contrary view see Morris, 49-50.
\end{itemize}
Henry's execution of John Fisher. Gardiner argued in his letter of defense that the mere fact that Fisher was a cardinal did not excuse him from obedience to the king or the just punishment of death for his "treason and disobedience." Nevertheless, it is true that during his controversy with Bucer several years later he did add to his emphasis on obedience the caveat that laws are to be complied with "in so far as they do not stand against God's precepts." Once again, this was a minor qualification and did not counterbalance Gardiner's strong statements regarding obedience, especially his assertion that obedience to authority has no limits. Seen from this perspective, Gardiner's refusal to submit to the Protestant principles of the Edwardian government is something of an anomaly.

The King's Book

In July 1537 a "large committee of bishops and divines" under Cromwell's direction completed the work known as The Bishop's Book, or Institution of a Christian Man, "which took the form of an elaborate exposition of the Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer

59 Stephen Gardiner, "Gardiner's Tract on Fisher's Execution," in Gardiner, Obedience in Church and State, 49.

60 Stephen Gardiner, "Gardiner's Answer to Bucer," in Gardiner, Obedience in Church and State, 177.
and the Ave Maria." In 1543 this work was revised and accepted by Parliament under the title *The King's Book, or A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man.* The changes made were chiefly in the direction of removing Lutheran ideas, moving the English church closer to the Roman Catholic church in doctrine. The King's Book was an important means of popularizing the doctrine of obedience within the English church.

Nevertheless, in the exposition of the fifth commandment, *The King's Book* borrowed Tyndale's use of this commandment to inculcate the necessity of obedience to secular political authority. This passage, it was argued, refers not only to one's natural parents but to "princes and all other governors, rulers, and pastors, under whom we be nourished and brought up, ordered and guided." And by honor is meant not merely reverence, but "also a prompt and ready obedience to their lawfull commandments." Thus, all subjects are by this commandment enjoined to honor and obey their princes. Furthermore, they may not for any reason withdraw "their fealty, truth, love, and obedience

---

61 Dickens, 200.

62 *The King's Book; or, A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932).

63 *The King's Book*, 99.

64 *The King's Book*, 99.
towards their princes . . . [or] conspire against his person." In short, the king's subjects must obey all his laws, a point which was reinforced by a discussion of Romans 13 and I Peter 2. To this injunction the usual exception was added: obedience to the king's laws does not extend to anything "against the commandment of God."

Thomas Starkey

The final author to be considered in this chapter is Thomas Starkey who is most famous for his Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset, an expression of humanist political ideas. Starkey received his education at Magdalen College, Oxford. Afterwards he entered the household of Reginald Pole, travelling abroad with him to Venice and Padua in 1532, and was appointed king's chaplain after his return to England in 1534. Later Henry asked him to obtain Pole's opinion regarding the divorce and the authority of the pope. Pole responded in 1536 with a rejection of Henry's claims, largely by way of refuting Sampson's

---

65 The King's Book, 104.
66 The King's Book, 104.
67 Thomas Starkey, A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset, ed. T. F. Mayer (London: Royal Historical Society, 1989). This work was not published during his lifetime, and it was not until the late nineteenth century when the manuscript itself was discovered.
In the midst of these events Starkey wrote his treatise, *An Exhortation to the People, instructynge theym to Unitie and Obedience*, which was published in 1536, although it had been presented to the king the previous year.

Starkey stated in his preface to King Henry that his purpose in writing this book was to instruct his subjects "to suche obedience as is dewe to your princely authorite." He noted that the lack of this unity and obedience had caused much division, discord, and sedition, especially in Germany.

In extolling the value of obedience, Starkey stated that it has been considered at all times and all places the "chiefe bonde and knotte of all vertue and good ciuilitie" and even the "mother of al vertue and honestie." By obedience to authority one demonstrates that reason, not

---

68 Pole's arguments in his letter to Henry were later published in his tract *Pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione* (1539).


73 Starkey, *Exhortation*, fol. 5.
pleasure or vanity, rules one's life. To this he added that Christ taught obedience by "doctrine and dede." Not surprisingly Starkey cited the favorite texts used by these authors to support obedience to the prince: Romans 13 and I Peter 2. Like Gardiner, Starkey contended that obedience to the king includes obedience to his dictates regarding things indifferent. He stated that "to all such things as be decreed by princely authority, to goddis worde nothynge contrarye, we are by goddis worde bound." In another place, however, he grounded obedience in common policy: obedience must be given to whatever has been "decreed by comon authoritie." This theme of common assent was an important one in Starkey's Exhortation, yet too much must not be made of it. It represents part of his argument that the king, not the pope, is by common agreement the supreme head of the church in England, and that the king's dictates are to be obeyed above the pope's. Further, in arguing

---

74 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 5.

75 Starkey, Exhortation, fols. 41, 70.

76 Elton, Policy and Police, 193-4, contends that the real purpose for Starkey's work lies in the exposition and defense of this position.

77 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 8. Cf. fol. 20 where he appears to be referring to Barnes since he borrows Barnes's phraseology.

78 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 9; cf. fols. 40, 41, 50, 83 (sic for 84), 84 (sic for 86).
against the pope's authority, Starkey noted that the pope has counselled "disobedience to princely authoritie, and to lawes authorysed by common counselle and good policie, to the obedience whereof, we are bounden by the lawes of god and of nature.""79 Nor can disobedience be justified under the pretext of establishing true religion.80 Moreover, whereas the "decree of [the] prince in thinges indifferent, byndeth vs vnder peine of damnation," the same is not true for the authority of either pope or general council.81

And what if one is required to do that which is contrary to God's Word? Is disobedience to one's prince then allowed? Starkey appears to accept this line of reasoning. He asserted that such a command "must be utterly abrogate and boldly disobeyed," for such "barbarous tyranny" must not be allowed.82 This statement is not the end of the matter, however, for at the end of his Exhortation he stated that under Henry such a dilemma will never occur. He wrote with great conviction:

And feare you not, that any suche thynges here amonge

---

79 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 18.

80 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 26. Cf. fol. 27 where he makes it clear that this is a reference to both Roman Catholics and radical Anabaptists.

81 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 70. Cf. fols. 8-9, 71, where Starkey argues that the decisions of general councils have no authority over a people until confirmed by "princely power and common counsell" (fol. 9).

82 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 8.
In short, obedience is always expected of Henry's subjects, and disobedience will never be necessary or allowed.

Conclusion

By the late 1530s the need to articulate and defend royal supremacy and obedience to the newly established order was less pressing. There were, to be sure, some lesser-known tracts produced during the threats of rebellion, 1536-7 and 1538-9. These were more popular in intention, however, rehearsing much that had already been said before, particularly by Sampson, Fox, and Gardiner. More important, with Cromwell's fall from favor and his execution

83 Starkey, Exhortation, fol. 83 (sic for 84).

84 There was also the need to reply to Pole's challenge as well. The best known of these popular tracts were the works of Richard Morison, especially his A Lamentation, showing what ruin and Destruction comes of Seditious Rebellion (1536); A Remedy for Sedition (1536); An Invective against the Great and Detestable Vice of Treason (1539); and An Exhortation to stir all Englishmen to the Defense of their Country (1539).

85 Skinner, 2:102-3. For an assessment of the impact of the writings of the royalist party see Elton, Policy and Police, 207-12.
in 1540, the guiding genius behind the royal propaganda campaign was removed, and no one of his abilities succeeded in his stead.

The emphasis that the defenders of royal supremacy gave to the question of obedience to authority was, for reasons of convenience, a narrow and shrill one. In order to prove their own obedience and trustworthiness, they wrote with great force of the heinous sin of disobedience and rebellion and the abominable crime of sedition and revolt. It is noteworthy that in their hands obedience was emphasized to the exclusion of any serious discussion of the limits or exceptions to obedience. They thus relegated disobedience and non-resistance, important Lutheran limits to obedience, to a status equivalent to active rebellion and treason against the crown.

Furthermore, their arguments for Henry's revolution were important in justifying and urging the acceptance of the establishment of royal supremacy over the English church. Henry's caesaropapist and Erastian tendencies were not so easily satiated, however. He desired and obtained real control over the administration of the church with very little dissent among the clergy.

By their reliance upon and reiteration of the Lutheran doctrine of obedience to authority, especially as articulated by Tyndale and Barnes, the defenders of royal supremacy legitimized and carried forward the Lutheran
expression of this idea, albeit with a more secular and political focus. Whereas before obedience to the prince had been defended by Protestants outside the pale, now obedience was being defended by men close to the king and to the administration of his government. Furthermore, this insistence upon obedience to the crown was to become an important characteristic of future Tudor and Stuart propaganda. The next defenders of obedience were those within the Church of England itself, for those within the church were not slow to perceive the crucial nature of obedience.
CHAPTER III

OBEDIENCE IN THE REFORMED ENGLISH CHURCH, 1547-1553

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another (Titus 3:1-3).\(^1\)

With the accession of Edward VI (r. 1547-53) to his father's throne came an important shift in royal policy. The question of reforming the English church along Protestant lines now took center stage while the issue of royal supremacy was relegated to the periphery. Those close to the young king advised a more radical course than any his father had been willing to take. For his part Edward appears not to have been reluctant in any way to adopt this new tack.

Those in charge of this Protestant Reformation in England were sympathetic to Lutheran ideas, yet they maintained a certain distance from all things Lutheran. Their approach to reforming the English church aimed at a via media, a middle way between Roman Catholicism and

\(^1\) All Scripture references are from the King James Version.
Lutheranism. This reforming party was headed by the capable and cautious Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556).

The reign of Edward was temporarily convulsed by several uprisings in 1549 which were the cause of much concern. According to G. R. Elton these rebellions were so serious that "for a time virtually all the southern half of England appeared to be convulsed by riot and rebellion."² The rebellions in Devon and Cornwall centered on a traditionalist rejection of Cranmer's Protestant innovations such as the Book of Common Prayer. In Norfolk the rebellion, led by Robert Ket (d. 1549), focused more on agrarian concerns associated with the rise of incipient capitalism, such as the fencing in of the commons.³ These and other lesser rebellions were put down with asperity by Somerset's government.

With these rebellions came a clear need to defend the legitimacy of obedience. Unlike the defense of obedience undertaken during Henry's reign, however, there appears to have been no royal encouragement for such projects. Nor was


there anyone of Cromwell's temperament to attract capable apologists. Instead, the defense of obedience came primarily from the pulpit, from those in important positions within the Church of England. Other than the fact that they were all Protestant Reformers, this new group was not, however, part of an organized movement. Men such as Cranmer, Hugh Latimer (1485-1555), John Hooper (d. 1555), and Sir John Cheke (1514-57) were the leading advocates of obedience at the time.

**Obedience in English Sermons**

The uprisings of 1549 in Devon and Cornwall and those in the same year in Norfolk, led by Ket, caused much concern in the Edwardian government. The rebels sought, among other things, a return to Roman Catholicism and economic egalitarianism. Several English ministers rose to defend obedience to the king, magistrates, and all constituted authority. Their ideas on obedience were primarily articulated in sermons which were printed soon afterwards. It is noteworthy that these men were not angling for preferment, but set forth their own views on the importance

---

4 Their ideas were not, contrary to J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1928), 125-33, indistinguishable from Tyndale and Barnes. Nor should they, as Christopher Morris, *Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 40, 58-9, has it, be indiscriminantly lumped together with both the English Lutherans and the defenders of royal supremacy.
of obedience to authority, reiterating much that had been stated before regarding obedience, as rehearsed above. They were, however, prominent spokesmen for the view of the Church of England, men such as Cranmer, Latimer, Hooper, and Cheke. They were not renegade heretics or royalist puppets.

**Thomas Cranmer**

Thomas Cranmer received his education at Cambridge, attaining the Doctor of Divinity degree. He is said to have advised King Henry, through Stephen Gardiner, to seek the learned opinion of the universities regarding his divorce and to have advanced rapidly due to Henry's approval of this course.\(^5\) He was sent to Rome to further the divorce proceedings in 1530, and in the following year he became ambassador to the emperor. Upon the death of William Warham (1450?-1532), he was nominated by Henry for the archbishopric of Canterbury, being consecrated for the office on 30 March 1533. Soon thereafter his court granted Henry his desired annulment. Cranmer appears to have adopted a position favorable to royal supremacy, but he never actually formally defended its tenets.\(^6\)

\(^5\) See pp. 43-4 above.

\(^6\) For this short summary of Cranmer's life and subsequent sketches of the other authors in this chapter, material has been drawn from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885-1901).
Nor did Cranmer publish any major work specifically on the subject of obedience; however, he did produce several important pieces on the subject following the rebellions of 1549. These writings include his *Answers to the Fifteen Articles of the Rebels, Devon, Anno 1549*, his notes for a homily against rebellion written about the same time, and his *A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion* which was probably written in response to Ket's rebellion. These documents are significant, for, in Jasper Ridley's words, they "show clearly the lines along which Cranmer was preaching at this time."  

These writings are, on the whole, uneven, but throughout Cranmer affirmed obedience to authority and included several significant additions to the prevailing doctrine. Cranmer's *Answers to the Fifteen Articles* is his


10 Ridley, 296.
reply to the fifteen articles drawn up by the Devon rebels and, as such, is not so much a defense of obedience as a strong rebuke to the rebels. On the other hand, his homily notes are sketchy but clear, and his most articulate and complete discussion can be found in his sermon on rebellion.

Cranmer's *Answers to the Fifteen Articles* appears close in attitude to the writings of the defenders of royal supremacy, for he defended at length the authority and laws of the king over and against the pope's authority and canon law. He argued that separate ecclesiastical courts should not exist. The novel element which Cranmer exhibits here lies in his assertion that Roman Catholics are undoubtedly traitors and heretics: "And yet how an absolute papist varieth from an heretic or traitor, I know not; but that a papist is also both a heretic and a traitor withal."11 In essence he argued that since canon law requires obedience to the pope, either one accepts this decree and is a traitor to the crown and England or one rejects it and is a heretic to the pope and Rome.

Cranmer's emphasis on the doctrine of obedience is clearly expressed in these selections. God has granted the sword to magistrates and not to subjects, and even if they are evil or tyrannical they must be obeyed. Superiors are to be obeyed, for God has appointed them for the good of

---

all. Cranmer added that the magistrate is to be obeyed so long as he does not command his inferiors to do anything "against God." In such a case disobedience is one's duty.

As may be expected, Cranmer never sanctioned the use of force in such a case. He contended instead that "subjects ought to make humble suit to their prince for reformation of all injuries, and not to come with force." To drive this point home he reminded his audience that Scripture provides no example where any righteous man is praised for taking "sword in his hand as against his prince or nobility, although he suffered never so much wrong or oppression." Consequently, Cranmer was eloquent in his denunciation of armed rebellion. Sedition and civil wars, he further noted, are God's punishment upon a country for such sins as ingratitude, contumacy, greed, and excessive clemency.

After pinpointing these causes of rebellion, Cranmer readily provided the remedy: repentance from these grievous sins. This sacred act he urged with great conviction and sincerity.

Before passing on it is worth noting one other argument:

---

12 Cranmer, Works, 2:188.  
13 Cranmer, Works, 2:189.  
15 Cranmer, Works, 2:189, 190-1.
Cranmer used against armed resistance. In stressing the reasonableness of obedience, he maintained that rebellion is wrong because Edward is "a most christian prince, most desirous to reform all griefs,"\(^{16}\) and elsewhere he declared Edward "a prince most innocent, most godly, and most careful for your surety and wealth."\(^{17}\) So what if another were to rule in his place that did not have these characteristics? Would it then be morally acceptable to resist the crown. Obviously Cranmer would not accept rebellion in such a circumstance, but others less cautious than he would, and soon did.

The Homily on Obedience

At this point it is worth examining the Edwardian homily, *An Exhortation concerning good Order, and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates*.\(^{18}\) This homily was part of the First Book of Homilies put together by Cranmer, a project which he had begun in 1542 but which was not published until 1547.\(^{19}\) The influence of these homilies must not be

---

\(^{16}\) Cranmer, *Works*, 2:188.


\(^{18}\) *An Exhortation concerning good Order, and obedience to Rulers and Magistrates*, in *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I* (1547-1571), 2 vols in one (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), 1:69-77.

\(^{19}\) Ridley, 265.
underestimated; for, according to Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup they "were required to be read in all English churches on every Sunday and Holy Day."  

Further, they note that these Homilies, and the subsequent ones issued under Queen Elizabeth (r. 1558-1603), were "as well known and as influential as any writings produced between 1547 and 1640" except the Book of Common Prayer.  

While it is unclear exactly who wrote the Homily on Obedience it undoubtedly expressed the views held by Cranmer, those who helped with preparing the Homilies, and those of a great many of their contemporaries. Moreover, this homily unquestionably inculcated into the mind of the English parishioner, if he or she needed it, a compliant attitude toward the policies of the government.

The Homily of Obedience began with an explicit affirmation of divinely ordained order: the great chain of being. God has ordained all, from the highest to the lowest. Obedience was then specifically enjoined to all "lawes, statutes, proclamations, and injunctions."  

---

20 Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup, "Introduction," Certaine Sermons, vi.

21 Rickey and Stroup, viii.


23 Certaine Sermons, 1:70.
authority of the king and other officers comes from God, not man. These higher powers were loftily described as "Gods Lieutenants, Gods Presidentes, Gods Officers, Gods Commissioners, Gods Judges, ordained of God himselfe." Not only must subjects obey their superiors, but they must patiently suffer any wrong done them by evil rulers. The Old Testament example of David's unwillingness to murder King Saul is used to reinforce this notion.

Nevertheless, any law against God's commandments must be disobeyed, though not violently by force of arms. Those who violate this injunction commit treason, conspiracy, and rebellion against "God, the common weale, and the whole Realme." Rebellion is a detestable sin with disastrous consequences. Finally, the ability of the pope to release the king's subjects from obedience to him was rejected out of hand. The homily ended with an appeal for all to "submit your selues vnto your King, your supreme head."

This homily, while not nearly as eloquent nor as overbearing as its more famous counterpart, An Homilie Against disobedience and wilfull rebellion (1570), provided a scriptural argument for political obedience very

24 Certaine Sermons, 1:71.
25 Certaine Sermons, 1:69 (sic for 75).
26 Certaine Sermons, 1:76.
27 An Homilie Against disobedience and wilfull rebellion, in Certaine Sermons, 2:275-[322].
much along the lines of Luther, but with a good deal of emphasis added on the need for order in society and on God's part in creating this order.

Hugh Latimer

Hugh Latimer was graduated from Cambridge and later converted to Protestantism. He was often in and out of trouble for his preaching, and just as often in and out of royal favor. By 1525 he was accused of heresy, but upon examination he denied that he accepted Lutheran ideas. In the late 1520s his views on the royal divorce brought him favor with Henry and preferment, but it was not long before he was again accused of heresy. In 1532 he appeared before Convocation to answer these charges and, after being confined at Lambeth, he abjured. Soon he was in favor again, being made a royal chaplain and, in the summer of 1535, the Bishop of Worcester. Upon passage of the Six Articles in 1539, however, Latimer was apparently "tricked into resigning" his bishopric.\(^{28}\) The following year he was put in custody, spending most of the next eight years under guard. Upon the accession of Edward, he was released from the Tower of London, becoming a popular preacher at Edward's court but never regaining his bishopric.

---

The works of Latimer to be considered here are his sermons, for he was, as G. R. Elton notes, one of "the foremost preachers of the day." In 1536 he gave a sermon at the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace, in which he urged obedience to the crown. This sermon appears to have been an exception to his usual fare at the time, however. It was not until 1549 that he began to preach regularly on obedience to the king, and between 1549 and 1552 he preached numerous sermons on the subject. The first of these, Latimer's sermons before King Edward, antedates the rebellions of 1549; yet his teaching of obedience to authority remained constant.

Latimer argued that the king and magistrates are to be obeyed since they have been ordained by God. This is the duty required of every true subject. God will judge the king for what he demands, but no subject can judge him. Latimer further explained that Christ taught the people "to obey their princes, kings, emperors, and magistrates." Latimer especially emphasized that the king's officers are


to be obeyed as well as the king himself, for they have their authority from the king. On the issue of things indifferent to salvation, Latimer accepted the view that the king's dictates are to be obeyed provided he does not require that which is against God.

Latimer particularly underscored this idea that immoral commands must not be obeyed. When laws are enacted which are against God and contrary to His Word, "then I may refuse to obey with a good conscience." Not only may one refuse to obey, but one must or else he will sin by doing evil. This idea again implies a willingness on the part of the one disobeying to suffer persecution. Interestingly Latimer did not hesitate to warn the king and magistrates that if they step over their divinely ordained boundaries and command evil then they will be punished.

Finally, Latimer accented his treatments of non-resistance with references to the rebellions of 1549 in Norfolk and Devon. The rebels, Latimer wrote, were guilty of sedition, in doctrine and in deed. Moreover, they were

---

31 Latimer, Works, 1:373.
33 Latimer, Works, 1:371. Latimer adds this qualification to obedience in many places, such as Latimer, Works, 1:300, 371-4, 512; 2:6, 17, 158.
34 Latimer, Works, 1:300, 373.
traitors against God, serving the devil in their rebellion. The reason he adduced for these rebellions
is different from Cranmer's: the covetousness of both parties, nobles and commons. Throughout, he maintained
that armed rebellion against one's sovereign or his appointed ministers cannot be permitted. No matter how
great the provocation, "I may not rise up against the magistrates, nor make any uproar; for if I do so, I sin
damnably."

John Hooper

The last important cleric to emphasize obedience under Edward was John Hooper. Hooper was educated at Oxford, and
soon thereafter he came under the influence of the Reformation writings of Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75). After the passage of Henry VIII's Six Articles, Hooper was examined by Stephen Gardiner and had to leave the country for a time to avoid prosecution for heresy. He spent time abroad at Strasbourg and Zurich,

35 Latimer, Works, 1:376-7, 496.


becoming acquainted with Bullinger, Martin Bucer (1491-1551), and John à Lasco (1499-1560). In 1549 he was appointed chaplain to Edward Seymour, the Protector Somerset (1500?-52), at which time the young King Edward came under his influence; however, Hooper's more radical ideas angered Cranmer. When he was offered the bishopric of Gloucester by John Dudley, the Protector Warwick (1502-53), he balked due to the wording of the oath and the question of vestments. The king himself removed these obstacles, and, after initially refusing again for similar reasons, Hooper was consecrated bishop. In 1552 Hooper was granted the bishopric of Worcester, which later was reduced to an archdeaconry, and subsequently the see of Gloucester. Hooper's reputation at the time was that of one devoted to the reformation of the church, and for his stand against vestments he is often seen as one of the first Puritans.

Soon after Mary ascended the throne, he was tried for heresy and executed on 9 February 1555.

Beginning in 1549 Hooper articulated the doctrine of  

---

38 Hooper was not the only Edwardian divine who rejected vestments. For John à Lasco's arguments for the abolition of vestments see The Reformation of the Church: A Collection of Reformed and Puritan Documents on Church Issues, ed. Iain H. Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 59-69.

obedience to authority in several of his works. The published writings which touch upon the topic of obedience include *A Declaration of the Ten Holy Commandments of Almighty God* (1549),\(^40\) *An Oversight and Deliberation upon the Prophet Jonas* (1550),\(^41\) *A Brief and Clear Confession of the Christian Faith* (1550),\(^42\) *A Godly Confession and Protestation of the Christian Faith* (1550),\(^43\) and *Annotations on Romans XIII* (1551).\(^44\) There are several important ideas common to these works that are worth pursuing here.

In his *Ten Commandments* Hooper returned to the Lutheran idea discussed above\(^45\) that the fifth commandment requires

\(^{40}\) John Hooper, *A Declaration of the Ten Holy Commandments of Almighty God*, in John Hooper, *Early Writings of John Hooper*, ed. Samuel Carr for the Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 249-430. The editor of this collection notes that while the date given on the title page of the Declaration is 1548, it must be a misprint because the preface bears the date 5 November 1549.


\(^{45}\) See p. 27 above.
not only the honoring of one's parents but also "commandeth obedience unto the superior powers." The connection between the fifth commandment and subjection to lawful authority had by this time become standard Protestant doctrine. Hooper did not hesitate to praise those in positions of authority, for he further argued that kings and other magistrates are like one's own father, and can be considered "as it were a second God appointed for us upon the earth."

Hooper's clearest expression of his understanding of obedience is contained in his Annotations on Romans XIII. Not surprisingly, this passage of Scripture is one to which Hooper repeatedly referred in making the case that existing secular authority is to be obeyed. Here he took up the refrain used by both Lutherans and royalists: the king and magistrates are to be obeyed since God has ordained their existence. Obedience to rulers is necessary, even if they are evil, for conscience' sake, and no one is exempt from obedience, not even the clergy.

It is at this point, after emphasizing the importance

---

46 Hooper, Early Writings, 353. A similar focus on obedience is present in Hooper's Jonas, in Hooper, Early Writings, 451-2, 474-5.

47 Hooper, Early Writings, 356.

48 Not including the Annotations, Hooper cites Romans 13 in Early Writings, 356, 364, 451, 474; and Later Writings, 77, 78, 84, 86, 87.
of obedience, that Hooper qualified his assertion, sounding very similar to Luther and Tyndale in his emphasis on disobedience and non-resistance. Laws established by higher powers are to be obeyed "except they command things against God's laws: then must we obey more God than men." 49 Hooper reiterated this caveat to the general requirement of obedience numerous times, 50 and his message is clear: anything commanded which is contrary to the word of God, the law of God, or the law of nature must be disobeyed. 51 Any who would disobey the king or magistrates for a lesser reason than this is guilty of disobeying God Himself and deserves condemnation.

This statement must not, however, be taken as an endorsement of armed resistance. On this question Hooper was unequivocal. In disobeying an immoral command, one must not "strive and fight with the magistrate, but suffer patiently death rather than to offend God." 52 In his view martyrdom would be preferable to treason against lawful authority, for those who take up weapons "against their kings and rulers" cause "tumults and seditions" which will

49 Hooper, Later Writings, 102.

50 See, for example, Hooper, Early Writings, 357; and Hooper, Later Writings, 53-4, 101, 103, 109, 127.

51 Hooper, Later Writings, 54, 102, 103.

52 Hooper, Later Writings, 102.
be punished by God with "eternal damnation." Moreover, vengeance for wrongs suffered must be left to God alone, for no one can take up arms against his superior without condemnation. In fact, Hooper's concern for the propagation of the Reformation and the education of the English people caused him to argue that the chief cause of sedition was a lack of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

It is interesting that Hooper did acknowledge that those who wield the spiritual sword, the Word of God, "ought to be without blame as well in their living as in their doctrine; otherwise, they ought to be deposed, and others to be placed in their rooms." Hooper, however, does not explain exactly how this spiritual deposition is to be accomplished. Clearly he did not envision armed rebellion, but his language is unguarded.

Sir John Cheke

An important product of the rebellions of 1549 was Sir John Cheke's *The hurt of sedition howe greuous it is to a*

53 Hooper, Early Writings, 451.

54 On the ignorance of Hooper's clergy see Dickens, 272-3.

55 Hooper, Later Writings, 79.

56 Hooper, Later Writings, 53.
commune welth, published in the same year. Cheke was educated at Cambridge, at which time he converted to the doctrines of the Reformation. His abilities in the Greek language gained him favor with the king and with others. In 1540 he became Greek lecturer at Cambridge. He became tutor to Prince Edward in 1542, upon whose accession he received further preferment. Cheke wrote The hurt of sedicion during his temporary absence from court due to a disagreement with Somerset. This book was the only work written specifically on political theory during the reign of Edward, the other works being primarily sermons.

Cheke argued in this work that the king should govern his subjects as a father rules his children, and they should obey him as a child obeys his father. He contended that "the magistrate is the ordinaunce of god," and, thus, whatever is done by the magistrate is done by God through His servant the magistrate. Furthermore, since the king has appointed magistrates by his authority and majesty, his subjects ought to obey them as they would the king and "oughte not to speke euil to any Magistrate of the

---

57 John Cheke, The Hurt of Sedition (Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1971). This work is sometimes known as The true subject to the rebel and was first published anonymously.

58 Cheke, sig. Fvi.

59 Cheke, sig. Aiiii.
people.\textsuperscript{60} It is a great service to God to obey and to serve one's magistrates.\textsuperscript{61} In his overwhelming emphasis on obedience to authority Cheke is close to the defenders of royal supremacy, for he did not mention that obedience should ever be limited in any way.

The hurt of sedition is more an invective against rebellion than a reasoned biblical defense of obedience to authority. Cheke asserted clearly that rebellion and sedition against the king is rebellion against God. For such an action the rebels deserve punishment, both from the king and from God. Cheke's focus remained, however, not so much on how rebellion is a sin before God or on how it is traitorous against the king; instead, he underscored how hurtful rebellion is to the commonwealth. Therefore, he wrote at great length on the results of sedition -- how it variously affects the cities, the shires, and so forth.\textsuperscript{62} The picture he painted is that of duly established authority, from the highest to the lowest, being ignored.

Cheke wrote the treatise immediately after the uprisings in Norfolk, Devon, and Cornwall. Consequently, he did not hesitate to deal with the specific economic justifications used by Ket's followers, such as the fencing

\textsuperscript{60} Cheke, sig. Avii. Cf. sigs. Bii-iii.

\textsuperscript{61} Cheke, sig. Biii.

\textsuperscript{62} Cheke, sigs. Dii-Dvii.
of the commons, and the more conservative religious demands of those in Devon and Cornwall, such as a return to the English church of Henry. Cheke urged the rejection of Roman superstition and affirmed the supreme authority of God's Word. Finally, Cheke, like Cranmer, ended by urging the rebels to repent of the sin of rebellion.

Conclusion

The similarity of the ideas of these Edwardian clerics to those of the defenders of royal supremacy lies in the fact that, as Christopher Morris argues, they "harped on the horrors of anarchy and disorder, on the need for national unity, on the harmony that should result from every man's abiding in his proper station." Their reaction to the uprisings in Devon, Cornwall, and Norfolk was to remind men of the need to obey their king and all his magistrates.

It is worth noting that they did not focus solely upon obedience to the king but also emphasized obedience to magistrates. This is an important addition. By emphasizing obedience to magistrates, these clerics applied their ideas on obedience to authority in a concrete way to governing authorities other than just the king.

Also important to note is the fact that these writings,

63 Cheke, sigs. Gvii-Hi.

64 Morris, 57-8.
with the exception of Cranmer's *Answers to the Fifteen Articles of the Rebels*, the *Homily on Obedience*, and Cheke's *The hurt of sedicion*, were not government sponsored or sanctioned works. Instead, they expressed the concern of their authors that authority at all levels ought to be obeyed. They popularized an essentially Lutheran view that the crown is to be obeyed in all things not contrary to God's Word and that it is sinful to take up arms against one's superior. The insurrections of 1549 elicited these and other less memorable writings on the duty of obedience. In short, these writers were not, with the possible exception of Cheke, just men dedicated to appeasing the king and receiving preferment.

Also worth noting here is the fate of these men. With the accession of Mary and the return of Catholicism, they faced a dilemma. Cranmer, Latimer, and Hooper paid for their unwillingness to obey the queen's command to recant their Protestant opinions with their lives. Cranmer, it is true, did sign several documents in an unconvincing attempt

---

to avoid execution. Cheke, on the other hand, recanted upon threat of the stake and died a broken man.

None seriously changed his opinion, however, regarding the obedience due to authority; for the important caveat that anything contrary to God's Word must not be obeyed permitted them, in this instance, to argue against authority. The particular issue at stake was the doctrine of transubstantiation. Since these Protestants held this doctrine to be unbiblical, they could with a clear conscience defy the queen, the pope, and anyone else who commanded them to believe it. Their refusal to obey Mary's command is an important development, for shortly there would be those who would expand this ability to disobey any command against Scripture into a duty to resist actively the queen who urged what they considered to be idolatry.
CHAPTER IV

ENGLISH CALVINISM AND RESISTANCE, 1553-1558

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye (Acts 4:19).

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). ¹

The reign of Edward had held out many hopes for those zealous to reform the English church. By the time of his death in 1553 much had already been accomplished, and the future looked promising for further reforms. The hopes of Cranmer and other English Reformers were, however, crushed by the death of the young king. The ill-fated attempt by John Dudley, the Earl of Warwick, to secure the throne for Lady Jane Grey (1537-54) ended in disaster, and Mary Tudor (r. 1553-8) succeeded her brother without further opposition. Her short reign, not surprisingly, proved to be one of Catholic reaction against the recent Protestant inroads within English church and society. Her goal was simple and straightforward: a return to the status quo ante. As G. R. Elton has written, "Mary's overriding ambition was to restore the realm to the true faith, to

¹ All Scripture references are from the King James Version.
obtain papal absolution for the sin of schism, and to eradicate heresy."²

The consequence of this new threat of persecution was to initiate the flight, or migration,³ of a significant number of English Protestant leaders to the Continent. It was at this time that many English Protestants came more directly under the influence of John Calvin (1509-64) and Calvinism. This is not to say, of course, that Calvin's ideas were unknown in England before the Marian Exile, but at this time his influence was much greater than ever before.⁴

One important result of the Marian Exile was the development of a coherent body of literature dedicated to defending the notion of armed resistance against wicked and idolatrous princely authority. The leading defenders of forcible resistance were John Ponet (1514?-56), Christopher

---


³ Christina Hallowell Garrett, The Marian Exiles: A Study in the Origins of Elizabethan Puritanism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 1-29, argues that migration is the more appropriate description since most left before the persecution began.

⁴ For the influence of Calvinism upon England see John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 309-330. In addition to the personal influence of Calvin himself, Calvinism also made inroads into England through the influence of many other like-minded reformers such as Martin Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and John à Lasco.
Goodman (1520?-1603), and John Knox (1505-72). The development of Lutheran and Calvinist doctrines of resistance must first be examined to provide adequate context.

**Lutheran and Calvinist Resistance Theories**

The development of resistance theories was once generally attributed to Calvinism, especially the English exiles in the 1550s and the French Huguenots in the 1570s, and the role of Lutheranism was minimized. J. W. Allen, a leading proponent of this view, writes: "Up to the year 1550 Lutherans and Calvinists alike preached with rather singular consistency a doctrine of non-resistance to the powers that be." Then, goes the story, Lutherans and Calvinists broke with Luther and Calvin on the issue of resistance to princely authority, developing a theoretical

---


justification for resistance by lesser magistrates.\textsuperscript{7} Moreover, since these later theorists were predominantly Calvinists, presumably it was primarily or solely Calvinism that provided the impetus for the development of the theory of resistance by lesser magistrates.

This view has been substantially revised by recent research. It is true that prior to 1530 Luther was unequivocally opposed to active resistance in any circumstance; however, from 1530 on he did reluctantly endorse resistance against the emperor in certain situations.\textsuperscript{8} Nevertheless, Luther did not develop a consistent theory of resistance but borrowed his ideas from others, "from their previous elaboration by Evangelical princes, jurists attached to their courts, and by Luther's own close theological colleagues."\textsuperscript{9}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Skinner these arguments fall into two general categories: "the constitutional theory of the Hessians, and the private-law theory of the Saxon jurists." The former stressed that the Imperial constitution established a limit upon the emperor, especially in that he could not persecute the Gospel; and it allowed the princes, or lesser magistrates, to resist him if he went beyond the boundaries of his office. The latter insisted that by virtue of his persecution of the Gospel, a matter over which he has no authority, the emperor is no longer acting as a divinely ordained authority but as a private citizen who may be lawfully resisted.

Luther's dual legacy of passive obedience and active resistance has been aptly summarized by W. D. J. Cargill Thompson:

Thus, paradoxically, it is arguable that Luther was in a sense the progenitor of the two main elements in sixteenth-century protestant political attitudes to obedience -- the earlier doctrine of non-resistance and the later theory of the right of inferior magistrates

---


to resist their superiors for the sake of religion."\(^{13}\)

The early German Lutheran notions of resistance first developed in the 1530s and 1540s found their most eloquent expression in the **Bekenntnis** (or **Confession**) of Magdeburg (1550),\(^{14}\) an attempt by the city officials to justify their stance against the Augsburg Interim and their opposition to the emperor's ban on Lutheranism.\(^{15}\)

The German Lutheran idea of resistance was quietly adopted by many within Calvinist circles, incorporating many of the same arguments. Calvin and his followers on the Continent, as a rule, adopted the constitutional argument with its limitation of resistance only by lesser magistrates rather than the private law argument which did not preclude

\(^{13}\) W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 92.

\(^{14}\) The full title is **Bekenntnis Unterricht und Vermanung der Pfarrherrn und Prediger der Christlichen Kirchen zu Magdeburg**.

the possibility of resistance by anyone.\textsuperscript{16} Precisely how this idea was transmitted is still unclear, and the focus remained, as in Lutheranism, on obedience to authority as the norm.

Calvin's view of resistance by lesser magistrates has been the subject of much scholarly controversy. While emphasizing obedience as the norm, Calvin did introduce in his \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion} the possibility of resistance by lesser magistrates, citing the examples of the Spartan ephors, the Roman tribunes, and the Athenian demarchs.\textsuperscript{17} Contrary to Christopher Morris's position,\textsuperscript{18} this discussion was included in every edition of the \textit{Institutes}, from 1536 to 1559.\textsuperscript{19} Some, like Skinner, see Calvin as "a master of equivocation" whose commitment to the right of resistance was tenuous, preferring instead non-resistance but admitting some exceptions.\textsuperscript{20} Others, such as

\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Skinner, \textit{Foundations}, 2:210-11.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] Morris, 156.
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] Eire, 288-9; Skinner, \textit{Foundations}, 2:192.
as H. A. Lloyd who has stated that Calvin affirmed the duty of inferior magistrates to "protect the commons against the tyrannical ruler" and "resist royal arbitrariness,"\(^{21}\) are more sure of Calvin's importance in the development of resistance by lesser magistrates.\(^{22}\) Like the Lutheran notion of resistance, Calvin's idea was based on the duty of the divinely ordained authorities to suppress idolatry and idolatrous rulers.\(^{23}\)

Other important Calvinists adopted similar forms of resistance by lesser magistrates in order to defend the Gospel. At Strasbourg, beginning in 1530, Martin Bucer (1491-1551) taught "the notion of the 'inferior magistrates'"\(^{24}\) and the accountability of the emperor to established authority, while J. H. Burns and J. W. Allen stress Calvin's passive resistance" (Richard G. Kyle, The Mind of John Knox [Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1984], 244).


\(^{23}\) Eire, 289.

them. By 1547 Pierre Viret (1511-71) acknowledged that the civil magistrate who interferes in spiritual matters may be resisted and deposed by lesser magistrates. Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-62), although often neglected in discussions of Calvinist theories of resistance, maintained as early as 1550 that "lesser magistrates have this right of rebellion but never private citizens." Theodore Beza (1519-1605) used the notion of lesser magistrates in 1554 to bolster his defense of Calvin and the burning of heretics by the civil magistrate, two decades before his eloquent defence of resistance in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres of 1572.

25 For Martin Bucer's political thought and his influence on Calvin's political thought, see Baron, 30-42.


29 Theodore Beza, The Right of Magistrates over their Subjects, in Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century: Three Treatises by Hotman, Beza, and
Other examples could be adduced. Let it suffice to say that by the 1550s Calvinists, building upon the resistance theories of the German Lutherans first articulated in the 1530s, were arguing that a tyrant may be resisted by lesser magistrates. A tyrant was seen primarily in religious terms, especially as it related to the imposition of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice and the suppression of the Reformation. The key justification for resistance was in cases where the ruler was involved in or urged idolatry, by which they meant Roman Catholic practices.\(^\text{30}\)

**English Resistance Theories**

It was to this heritage that Ponet, Goodman, and Knox appealed when they wrote their clarion calls to resist the government of Mary Tudor. In their hands the theory of resistance was transformed from a tentative and highly qualified possibility into a solemn Christian duty to oppose idolatry and the unnatural rule of women. Moreover, they appealed not so much to the constitutional argument as to the private law argument which their fellow Calvinists had rejected, and, hence, their tendency to be much more radical, not limiting resistance merely to lesser

---

\(^\text{30}\) Erie, 276-310.
magistrates. Their views were not, however, acknowledged by Calvin and his followers as being akin to their own. Calvin was at great pains to distance himself from their ideas, particularly on the question of female rulers.

Nevertheless, while the Calvinist and Lutheran heritage was important in the development of their ideas, it must not be forgotten that English Protestantism, following Luther, had always maintained that "God is to be obeyed more than man." Thus when Ponet, Goodman, and Knox exposed the conflict between obeying God and Queen Mary, they did not have to go far to drop the prevailing notion of passive resistance for active resistance. In their view, since idolatry could not be countenanced at any price, it must be resisted.

John Ponet

John Ponet received his education at Queens' College, Cambridge. He was graduated Doctor of Divinity in 1547. He quickly received preferment within the English church, beginning with his appointment as Cranmer's chaplain. He

---


received the bishopric of Rochester in 1550, and the following year Ponet succeeded Stephen Gardiner, who had been removed from office, as bishop of Winchester. Soon after the accession of Mary he was deprived of his bishopric and fled to the Continent. Ponet appears to have returned to England and to have been involved in Wyatt's rebellion, but either he was released or escaped from prison. He fled to Peter Martyr Vermigli at Strasbourg, arriving before August, 1554. He is, however, most famous for his tract *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power, and of the true Obedience which subjectes owe to kynges and other ciuile Gouernours, with an Exhortacion to all true naturall Englishe men*, first published in 1556.

Ponet's *Shorte Treatise* was a remarkably original work in many ways. The prominence that he gave to historical examples, drawn from biblical, classical, and world history, to prove his points is noteworthy. With the publication of his work, there was a clear break with recent English


political writers and the emphasis they gave to the norm of obedience to the crown; for disobedience received much greater emphasis, culminating in his advocacy of resistance.

He began his work with a discussion of the limits of political power. Civil government has, according to Ponet, been established by God for the commonweal. This led him to argue that kings and other rulers do not rule with absolute power and authority. In addition they are not above law, for they are subject to both God's law and the laws of the land. Consequently, when the prince violates the law, he is subject to the just punishment due for such a crime just as any of his subjects.36

Ponet dealt directly with the subject of obedience, and he asserted in clear terms that obedience to authority is not an absolute requirement. He made what may seem at first an unusual distinction: "If Obedience be to muche or to litell in a common wealthe, it causeth muche euil and disordre."37 The contrast he was driving at here was between Roman Catholics whom he believed urged obedience too much and Anabaptists whom he regarded as disobedient rebels. Returning to the question of how far obedience should extend, Ponet stated that a prince who is dedicated to reforming the church ought to be obeyed and one who allows

37 Ponet, sig. Cviii.
error, idolatry, and persecution to plague the church should not be obeyed. Moreover, he urged the limitation of the power of civil government: "God hathe not geuen it [civil government] power ouer the one and the best parte of man, that is, the soule and conscience of man."  

Ponet delineated a crucial distinction, one commonly stated by English political writers from Tyndale and Barnes to Goodman and Knox. The idea is that God must always be obeyed, and, in a conflict between a command of God and a command of man, obedience to God comes first. Any command which is "contrarie or repugnaunt to Goddes commaundementes and iustice" must not be obeyed. Ponet further specified that disobedience is called for if one is commanded "to dishonour God, to committe idolatrie, to kill an innocent, to fight against thy countrey." To bolster his position on disobedience Ponet discussed numerous examples from history. To this point there is nothing in Ponet's work, except for a general change in focus and tone away from obedience to the exceptions to obedience, with which any English political writer of the prior thirty years

---

38 This sentiment, common to Ponet, Goodman, and Knox, explains their seemingly contradictory advice of obedience to Edward and Elizabeth and resistance against Mary.

39 Ponet, sig. Di.

40 Ponet, sig. Diii.

41 Ponet, sig. Diii.
would have disagreed.

The most controversial section in Ponet's work is the sixth, "Wether it be lauffull to depose an euil gouernour, and kill a tyranne." He again used historical examples to prove his point. Ponet argued from the depositions of Edward II and Richard II that deposing a tyrant is no new thing. In addition, he contended that deposition has been an accepted practice for removing church leaders from office. The best example of this, he insisted, was the Council of Constance (1414-1418) removing the three rival popes and replacing them with Pope Martin V (r. 1417-31). These and many other examples caused Ponet to wax eloquent in summarizing his view: "Emperours, kinges, princes and other gouernours abusing their office, [may] be deposed and remoued out of their places and offices, bi the body or state of the Realme or common wealthe." In bolstering his position Ponet made several important points. He argued that a prince may not always be ordained by God, but only those who act justly rule according to God's will. This is an important distinction, new to


43 Ponet, sig. Gv.

44 Ponet, sig. Giili.
English political thought. Ponet appealed at times to the ruling classes and at times to the individual. Kings and governors, for example, are accountable to the commonwealth and "haue their autoritie of the people." On the other hand, in discussing the question of tyrannicide, Ponet endorsed and encouraged the act by anyone. He anticipated the question of whether a private individual may kill a tyrant, admitting the possibility: "Yet the lawes of many christiane regiones doo permitte, that priuate men maie kil malefactours, yea though they were magistrates, in some cases." This statement he tempered somewhat by saying that any private individual who would execute "iuste punishment vpon tirannes, idolaters, and traiterous gouvernours" must "haue som special inwarde commaundement or surely proued mocion of God."  

Ponet did, in fact, develop a process for dealing with a tyrannical king or queen. First, one should appeal to the those in authority under the crown, the nobility. If they do nothing then one should "complayne to som minister of the worde of God" who has the authority to examine them and, if found guilty, to excommunicate them for their sins. Only

45 Ponet, sigs. Gv-Gvi.
46 Ponet, sig. Gviii.
47 Ponet, sig. Gviii. Ponet never explained what he meant by this "inward commandment" of God or how one could discern that someone had such from God.
when these means have been exhausted does the private individual have the responsibility of ridding the land of a tyrannical and idolatrous ruler.

The importance of Ponet and his *Shorte Treatise* has been firmly established. Christopher Morris has described Ponet as "the acutest of English political thinkers between Tyndale and Hooker." Ponet's was the first English expression of a resistance theory, and, according to Robert M. Kingdon, Ponet's call "for popular revolution and tyrannicide" made it "one of the most radical" works of his generation. Francis Oakley characterizes the work as the "first complete doctrine of resistance formulated by a Protestant thinker on other than purely religious grounds."

Christopher Goodman

Christopher Goodman was educated at Brasenose College, Oxford, attaining, among his other degrees, the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1551. By 1554 he had left England, residing at Strasbourg, Frankfurt, and Geneva. In Frankfurt he sided with Knox in rejecting the English Book of Common Prayer. Upon their removal to Geneva, Knox and Goodman were

---

48 Morris, 146.


50 Oakley, 10.
called by the English church in that city to pastor their congregation in September 1555. In 1558 Goodman published his most important work, *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyd of Their Subiects: and Wherin they may lawfully by Gods Worde be disobeyed and resisted.*

The most controversial element in Goodman's work was his vitriolic attack upon Queen Mary and all women rulers. Mary is referred to unflatteringly, for example, as that "vngodlie and vnlawful Gouernesse, wicked Iesabel: who for our synnes, contrarie to nature and the manyfeste worde of God, is suffred to raigne ouer vs in Goddes furie." This equation of Queen Mary with Jezebel was an important element in the writings of many of the Marian exiles.

In his *Superior Powers* Goodman rejected the current teaching "that it was not lawful in anie case to resist and disobeye the superior powers." As has already been shown the former view was frequently stated and the latter was often implied, though rarely stated. Heeding this

---


52 Goodman, 34.


54 Goodman, 30.
counsel, he argued, amounts to obedience to man rather than God. This idea, that God must be obeyed rather than man, was Goodman's recurring theme. On this point Goodman was unequivocal and uncompromising. In some passages Goodman merely seems close to the Lutheran notion that an evil command must be disobeyed. In other passages he clearly went further in urging resistance. For Goodman it was not so much a certain type of law that is to be disobeyed, but rather it is a certain type of ruler, an evil and idolatrous ruler, that is to be disobeyed.

Goodman avoided what others saw as the clear implication of Romans 13, unquestioned obedience to civil authority, by making a distinction between God's choosing a king and men choosing a king who was not of God's choosing, such as King Saul in the Old Testament. This test he then applied to Queen Mary. Since it is unnatural and unbiblical for a woman to rule over men, she was not to be considered a legitimate sovereign who had been ordained by God and thus deserved obedience.

In urging disobedience to wicked commands, Goodman

---

55 The work is, in fact, an expansion upon a sermon delivered by Goodman upon the text of Acts 4:19. Goodman, 4.

56 Goodman answered objections to his position at length by countering the prevalent interpretation of Romans 13 (pp. 106-13) and I Peter 2:13-18 (pp. 113-23).

57 Goodman, 51-4; cf. 96-100.
adduced many examples. The most notable of these was the example of Mattathias who, when commanded by the officers of Antiochus to establish idolatry, slew the king's officer and pulled down the altar. From this he drew the conclusion that in such cases resisting the superior power is true obedience to God and His laws. This he tied to the present situation in England by equating Roman Catholicism, especially the celebration of the mass, with idolatry. Goodman's conclusion was straightforward enough: "The worde of God freethe you from the obedience of anie Prince, be he neuer so mightie, wise, or politike, commanding anye thinge whiche God forbiddeth, and herein geueth the you auctoritie to withstand the same." Furthermore, he argued that Mary deserved the punishment of death "as an open idolatres in the sight of God, and a cruel murtherer of his Saints before men, and merciles traytoresse to her own natie countrie."

Considering his argument to this point, it is somewhat surprising that Goodman made an ineffectual attempt to reject private revenge as the norm; nevertheless, he

59 Goodman, 77.
60 Goodman, 96-7.
61 Goodman, 99. Goodman was very anti-Spanish, and he did not hesitate to draw the conclusion that England would be betrayed because of Mary's marriage to Philip.
contended, using the example of David who refused to kill King Saul, that a private person can only use violence if he is inspired by God to do so. At this point Goodman developed the private law argument:

But whereas the kings or Rulers are become altogether blasphemers of God, and oppressors and murtherers of their subiectes, then ought they to be accounted no more for kings or lawfull Magistrats, but as private men: and to be examined, accused, condemned and punished by the Lawe of God.\(^62\)

However, Goodman did not merely limit resistance to lesser magistrates like Continental Calvinists. Instead, he stated that while it chiefly belongs to inferior magistrates to resist tyranny, the common people are also responsible to resist.\(^63\) Furthermore, all men are required to see that the law of God is obeyed and that those who violated it are punished. Goodman stated this idea clearly when he wrote that if punishment is "not done by the consent and ayed of the Superiours, it is lawfull for the people, yea it is their duetie to do it them selues, as well vpon their owne rulers and Magistrat, as vpon other of their bretheren."\(^64\) Precisely how this is to take place is, however, unclear. Presumably this was a call "for popular revolution and tyrannicide."\(^65\) Similar ideas, though often less

\(^{62}\) Goodman, 139-40.

\(^{63}\) Goodman, 142-73.

\(^{64}\) Goodman, 189-90.

explicit,\textsuperscript{66} were propounded by Goodman's friend Knox.

**John Knox**

While more generally known as the leader of the Scottish Reformation, John Knox was an important figure in the English Reformation. Knox was educated at St. Andrews University, becoming a priest. He was converted to Protestantism in 1542 principally through the efforts of George Wishart (1513?-46). After the murder of Cardinal David Beaton (1494?-1546) Knox was invited by the Protestants at St. Andrews Castle to preach to them. Upon the fall of the castle, he became a galley slave in a French ship for nineteen months, being released in February 1549. From 1549 to 1553 he lived primarily in England, being sent by Cranmer to preach at Berwick and appointed chaplain to Edward VI. He was offered preferment, including a bishopric, within the English church but refused for reasons that are unclear.\textsuperscript{67} What differentiated Knox from many of his contemporaries was his conviction that there must be scriptural warrant for every religious activity and action.

\textsuperscript{66} Kyle, 264.

For this stance he was often at odds with Cranmer. With the
death of Edward, Knox went into exile on the Continent for
the next six years, spending most of the time at Calvin's
Geneva.

While on the Continent Knox continued to write letters
and tracts to encourage the faithful in both England and
Scotland. The latter works, together with his writings
completed after his return to Scotland, are beyond the scope
of this present work, except in so far as they help in
explicating Knox's ideas on resistance. His most infamous
work, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous
Regiment of Women, was written in late 1557 and published
the following year. While Knox in this work used
many arguments, Richard G. Kyle maintains that the Old
Testament was "the primary source for Knox's theory of
resistance." While Knox's work has many striking
similarities to Goodman's Superior Powers there is no
indication that he borrowed his ideas from either Goodman or

68 John Knox, The First Blast of the Trumpet Against
the Monstrous Regiment of Women, in John Knox, The Works of
John Knox, ed. David Laing, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed for
the Bannatyne Club, 1846-64; reprint, New York: AMS Press,
1966), 4:349-422 (hereinafter cited as Works).

69 Kyle, 248. On this point see W. J. Vesey, "The
Sources of the Idea of Active Resistance in the Political
Like Goodman, however, Knox explicitly established limits to obedience. For example, in 1548 he wrote that princes "are called the sons of God, and should be obeyed in all things not repugning to the command of God."\(^71\)

Knox, with characteristic frankness, began the First Blast with a bold statement of his thesis:

To promote a Woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion, or empire above any Realme, Nation, or Citie, is repugnant to Nature; contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to hisreveled will and approved ordinance; and finallie, it is the subversion of good Order, of all equitie and justice.\(^72\)

In 1554 Knox had sought Calvin's advice on four troubling questions, and Calvin sent him to Bullinger for further

---

\(^{70}\) Dan G. Danner, "Christopher Goodman and the English Protestant Tradition of Civil Disobedience," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8 (1977): 70, notes that Knox and Goodman undoubtedly consulted one another. They were, after all, close friends and co-workers at Geneva.


\(^{72}\) Knox, *Works*, 4:373.
consultation.\textsuperscript{73} The second, whether a female can rule a kingdom by divine right, is significant here, for Knox had obviously gone beyond Bullinger's sketchy reply.\textsuperscript{74} Knox marshalled a plethora of sources to bolster his view that females normally should not be rulers, citing evidence from Aristotle to the church Fathers, and from the light of nature to the light of the Scripture. In addition, Knox, like Goodman, scornfully compared Mary with Jezebel.

Kingdon notes that "only at this point does the argument enter the domain of resistance theory, and the conclusion is not elaborated very much."\textsuperscript{75} The fact that the "the Realme and Estates therof have geven their consentes to a woman" meant nothing to Knox, for a woman ruler is "against his worde and ordinance."\textsuperscript{76} Knox, not surprisingly, concluded that it is the "dutie" of the "Estates" to depose female rulers, for the nobility established them in their power.\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, it is

\textsuperscript{73} J. H. Burns, "Knox and Bullinger," \textit{Scottish Historical Review} 34 (April 1955): 90-91, argues persuasively that Bullinger's visitor in March 1554 was Knox.

\textsuperscript{74} The questions, together with Bullinger's reply, can be found in "Certain Questions Concerning Obedience to Lawful Magistrates, with Answers by Bullinger," in Knox, \textit{Works}, 3:217-26.

\textsuperscript{75} Kingdon, "Calvinism and Resistance Theory," 197.

\textsuperscript{76} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:415.

\textsuperscript{77} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:416.
their responsibility to put to death all idolaters, including one who is a monarch.\textsuperscript{78}

Knox's third and fourth questions to Bullinger dealt with the legitimacy of resistance against an idolatrous sovereign. The avoidance of idolatry was one of Knox's chief concerns, and he believed it to be the legitimate role of godly government to suppress idolatry.\textsuperscript{79} By idolatry Knox meant something very specific: the inclusion in the worship of God of anything that is not "commanded in the Scriptures."\textsuperscript{80} To Knox, this was no mere parochial attitude. In the words of John R. Gray, Knox considered "the chief and first care of princes ought to be to promote the glory of God."\textsuperscript{81} In Knox's estimation idolatry, a monstrous sin, must first of all be avoided by the believer, and, whenever feasible, be resisted and abolished, even to the point of deposing a Catholic monarch.\textsuperscript{82}

In two other works written in 1558, printed in Geneva and addressed to Scotland, Knox made his theory of resistance both more explicit and more radical. These were his \textit{The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the
Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland\textsuperscript{83} and his A Letter Addressed to the Commonality of Scotland.\textsuperscript{84} To the later Knox added a Summary of the Proposed Second Blast of the Trumpet.\textsuperscript{85} In the Appellation Knox contended, as he had in his First Blast, that it is

\begin{quote}
the dutie of the Nobilitie, Judges, Rulers, and People of England, not only to have resisted and againsted Marie, that Jesabel, whome they call their Queen, but also to have punished her to the death, with all the sort of her idolatrous Preestes, together with all such as should have assisted her.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

In the Letter to the Commonality he shifted the responsibility to resistance from the nobility to include the commons. The concept of the covenant was central to Knox's vision,\textsuperscript{87} for not to resist sin is to participate in that sin.\textsuperscript{88} Knox wrote that "as your Princes and Rulers are criminal with your Byshoppes of all idolatrie committed, and of all the innocent blood that is shed for the testimonie of Christes trueth, and that because they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:461-520.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:521-538.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:539-40. Anthony Gilby's Admonition to England and Scotland is also included in this volume. It is reproduce in an appendix of Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:541-71.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4:507.
\item \textsuperscript{87} On Knox's development of covenant thought see Greaves, \textit{Theology and Revolution}, 114-125.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Kyle, 269.
\end{itemize}
maintaine them in theyr tyrannie, so are you." The outline for the proposed Second Blast is Knox's clearest justification for resistance.

In all of these works Knox maintained a singular vision that has been aptly described by Kingdon as "resistance to women and Catholic clergymen, not to governments in general." That was precisely what Knox wished to do — replace Catholic rule and its appeal to tradition with Protestant rule and its emphasis on fidelity to Scripture. After all, God must be obeyed rather than man.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the ideas of these Marian exiles constituted a significant break with the notion common since Tyndale of passive obedience to monarchs. The resistance theories of the Marian exiles were not, however, mere political philosophies abstracted from religious concerns as some would have it. Nor can one make psychological elements the primary motivation behind these theories. Equally weak is the attempt to make changing situations the cause for the sanctioning of

89 Knox, Works, 4:535.
91 As in Skinner, "Origins," passim.
92 As is the thesis of Walzer.
Carlos M. N. Eire makes this point abundantly clear:

What makes the Calvinist theories "distinctively Calvinist" is not the arguments themselves, but the reasons for the arguments, and beyond that, the reason for the theories and the cause itself. This is the struggle against idolatry -- and not just idolatry in the church, but as a social phenomenon, as something that needs to be wiped out from the body politic.

Resistance was, therefore, primarily an extension into the political sphere of a theological insistence that God must be obeyed.

Perhaps the change from non-resistance to resistance was in some sense inevitable. Sir Thomas More believed it was. He saw clearly that Tyndale's caveat that an immoral command be disobeyed passively could lead to serious conflicts between the state and anyone who followed Tyndale's advice. More's mistake was in equating Tyndale's view with an appeal to treason and sedition. Nevertheless, ideas do have consequences. Once the notion that God must be obeyed rather than man was admitted, it was not far to extend this argument to include, as part of obeying God, resistance against idolatrous and tyrannical rulers. It was merely one of changing tactics, not changing the underlying

---

93 This is the explanation Cargill Thompson gives in "Luther" and in Political Thought of Luther for Luther's change of position. His argument, such as it is, could apply equally to Ponet, Goodman, and Knox.

94 Eire, 308.

95 See pp. 48-9 above.
philosophy. Knox, for example, explained his change of
tactics in these terms during his debate with William
Maitland of Lethington (1525?–73) at the General Assembly of
the Church of Scotland in June, 1564. He stated that when
Christians are in the minority, non-resistance is the norm.
"The people assembled together in one body of a
Commonwealth," however, have sufficient means to suppress
idolatry and resist an idolatrous monarch.96 Seen from
this perspective, the ideas of Ponet, Goodman, and Knox are
not so much a break with the English tradition of passive
obedience as the logical consequence of stressing obedience
to God and His Word. They were, in short, more
epistemologically self-conscious than their predecessors,
being more consistent with their presuppositions.

Finally, the impact of both ideas, non-resistance and
resistance, upon England continued well beyond the time
period under consideration here. Obedience continued to
hold sway in the Church of England under Elizabeth. It was
implicit in the Thirty-Seventh Article of the Thirty-Nine
Articles. Moreover, in the wake of the Northern Rebellion
in 1569–70 and Pope Pius V's bull of excommunication,
Regnans in Excelsis, in 1570 releasing Elizabeth's subjects
from obedience to the crown, non-resistance was officially

96 John Knox, John Knox's History of the Reformation in
Scotland, ed. William Croft Dickinson, 2 vols. (New York:
Philosophical Library, 1950), 2:122.
reiterated in 1570 with *An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*.\(^97\) James I (r. 1603-25) went even further, arguing for the divine right of kings.\(^98\)

On the other hand, the return of the Marian exiles and the development of the Puritan party assured the continuance of the notion of forcible resistance in England. The notes of the Geneva Bible, whose translation was headed by close associates of Knox and Goodman,\(^99\) William Whittingham (1524?-79) and Anthony Gilby (d. 1585), embodied Calvinist versions of both obedience and resistance.\(^100\) This work and its understanding of Scripture became the foundation for many of the ideas present in Puritan movement.

Moreover, the conflict between Parliament and the crown in seventeenth-century England, with the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, can be seen, in part, as the working out of these ideas on obedience and disobedience to

---

\(^97\) *An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion, in Certayne Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571)*, 2 vols in one (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), 2:275-322.

\(^98\) In his works *Basilikon Doron* (1598) and *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1600), James argues that subjects owe total, complete, and abject obedience to their sovereign. See *The Political Works of James I*, ed. C. H. McLlwain (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918).

\(^99\) Dickens, 344.

civil authority. Influential writers, such as John Cheke on obedience and Ponet on resistance, were reprinted during the revolutionary upheavals of seventeenth-century England.\footnote{Cheke's work was reprinted in 1569, in 1576, in Raphael Holinshed's \textit{The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland} in 1577 and 1587, and in 1641 on the eve of the English Civil War ("Note" in John Cheke, \textit{The Hurt of Sedition} [Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1971], n.p.). Ponet's work was reprinted in 1639 and 1642 (Dickens, 343).}

Finally, in 1688, with the forced abdication of James II (r. 1685-8) by Parliament, rebellion against tyrannical government was recognized as legitimate by the ruling classes and defended on a secular basis in the work which Skinner aptly describes as "the classic text of radical Calvinist politics,"\footnote{Skinner, \textit{Foundations}, 2:239.} John Locke's \textit{Two Treatises on Government}.\footnote{John Locke, \textit{Two Treatises on Government}, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Laslett demonstrates in his introduction that Locke's \textit{Treatises} were actually written in the early 1680s, prior to the Glorious Revolution, thus making his ideas more radical than appear at first glance. As with Knox, theory preceded action.}
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


**Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571).** 2 vols in one. Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968.


_____. *The Education of a Christian Prince*. Translated,


______. Later Writings of John Hooper. Edited by Charles


The King's Book; or, A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932.


______. Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings.


——. *An Invective Ayenste the great and detestable vice, treason, wherein the secrete practices, and traiterous workinges of them, that suffrید of late are disclosed*. The English Experience, No. 477. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972.


Edited by J. J. S. Perowne for the Parker Society.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1854; reprint,

Saint German, Christopher. An Answer to a Letter. The
English Experience, No. 566. New York: Da Capo Press,

———. A Treatise Concerning the Division between the
Spirituality and Temporality. The English Experience,

———. A Dialogue bytwixt a Doctoure and a Student in
Lawes. The English Experience, No. 552. New York: Da

Shakespeare, William. The Riverside Shakespeare. Edited
by G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
1974.

Starkey, Thomas. A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset.

———. Exhortation to Unitie and Obedience. The English

Thomas à Kempis. The Imitation of Christ. New York:
Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.

The Supper of the Lord after the True Meaning of John
VI, and 1 Cor. XI, and Wm. Tracy's Testament Expounded.
Edited by Henry Walter for the Parker Society.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1850; reprint,

———. Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to
Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures. Edited by
Henry Walter for the Parker Society. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1848; reprint, New York:
Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968.

———. Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the
Holy Scriptures, together with The Practice of
 Prelates. Edited by Henry Walter for the Parker
Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849;


Secondary Works

Books


Aston, Margaret. Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion. London: Hambledon


Fraser, Antonia. Mary Queen of Scots. New York: Dell, 1969.


________. *Edward VI: The Young King (The Protectorship of*


McConica, James Kelsey. *English Humanists and Reformation Politics Under Henry VIII and Edward VI.* Oxford:


________. *John Foxe and His Book*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1940.


Neale, J. E. *Queen Elizabeth I: A Biography*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1934; reprint, Garden City, N.Y.: 


Scott, Otto. *James I: The Fool as King.* Vallecito,


Articles


_______. "The Political Ideas of George Buchanan." Scottish Historical Review 30 (1951): 60-68.


Danner, Dan G. "Christopher Goodman and the English Protestant Tradition of Civil Disobedience." Sixteenth


Hall, Basil. "The Early Rise and Gradual Decline of


"Natural Law in the Thought of Luther." Church History 10 (1941): 211-27.


Skinner, Quentin. "The Origins of the Calvinist Theory of


