

THE ENGLISH INTERPRET ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS  
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: FROM GOD SAVE THE KING  
TO GOD HELP THE KING, 1532 – 1649

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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## **Abstract**

In England, 1532-1649 was an era during which questions about obedience to rulers dominated ethical discussions. Most English people also respected biblical authority for governing certain behaviors. Obedience was central to the monarchy's survival and the Bible was central to reformation of an English Church laden with medieval accretions. St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 13:1-7 was the most important biblical passage for understanding the Christian's relationship to civil authority during this period, and interpreters had such high regard for biblical authority that the backing of this passage was crucial to the acceptance of any political theory that involved ideas about obedience or disobedience.

Though eisegesis was not out of the question as a technique among these interpreters, societal and political circumstances motivated most exegetes to examine the text more closely than they might have if St. Paul's meaning had been irrelevant. These conditions led to creative handling of the text that permitted the exegetes to continue to submit to biblical authority while advocating their varied opinions on obedience to civil authority. Some interpreters moved outside the constraints of traditional views of monarchy and obedience to develop a theory that God mediated his call to rulers through those who elected them. Acceptance of this theory finally brought

about rejection of divine right monarchy, as symbolized by the execution of Charles I in 1649. By too quickly concluding that these English expositors merely sought biblical justification for their views after the fact, scholars have failed to appreciate how Romans 13 positively shaped Reformation views of the Christian's relationship to the state. As the title suggests, this study will examine the discernable shift from seeing Romans 13:1-7 as a text that commands non-resistance to rulers to one that not only permits disobedience, but requires it. Thus, Romans 13 is not simply an influential political text, but stands as the most important political text of the period under consideration. This dissertation supplies a needed analysis of representative exegesis of Romans 13:1-7 during this critical period of English history and considers the influence of these expositions on the development of republican ideals.

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Precious, whose belief in me has never flagged. You are the truest person I know and the greatest human influence in my life.

This work is also dedicated to others who have longed for the completion of this project:

To my children, Hope Evangeline and Jesse Nathaniel. You have taught me the wonder of grace. May you never lose your passion for truth and your love of beauty.

To my parents, Dr. Ralph and Lucille Atchison. Thank you for passing on the love of books and the love of England, and your example of honesty, industry, and hard work.

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To the students and friends of Emmanuel House. Thank you for never despairing of this journey we share. You teach me far more than you realize.

*Οι γαρ τοιαυτα λεγοντες εμφανιζουσιν οτι πατριδα επιζητουσιν.*

## **Introduction: Thesis and Justification for This Study**

In 1548, Henry, Lord Stafford, translated Edward Fox's, The True Dyfferes Between Ye Regall Power and the Ecclesiastical Power from the original Latin into English. Fox was an influential and conspicuous figure as the almoner and researcher extraordinaire for Henry VIII. As almoner he managed the distribution of the portion of Henry's income designated for the needy, and as leader of a team of researchers he had worked hard and traveled far for his king prior to his untimely death in 1538 to establish precedent for the royal supremacy, the doctrine that proclaims the king as head of the English Church. Eventually rewarded by Henry with a bishopric for his service, Fox came to be perceived as a proto-Protestant by those who hoped that Henry's supremacy would eventually result in an English Church formed along the lines of the Reformation then occurring on the Continent. As a pioneer of English Protestantism, Fox's views would have been received with interest by those who read them in the vernacular. In the preface of the translated edition of Fox's defense of royal power, dedicated to Edward Seymour, uncle of the young King Edward VI and Lord Protector of England, Stafford contends that it was through ignorance of teachings of the Scriptures that the English had exchanged proper obedience to their king for servitude to the pope. Stafford gives credit to a courageous explication of God's Word

for liberating English Christians and the English Church from servitude to the Bishop of Rome and the Roman Church. Certainly one might question the true motivation of Stafford and others like him who showed exuberance about the apparent victory over Roman ecclesiastical tyranny, but Stafford's remarks about the efficacy of scriptural exposition show the importance of biblical precedent in sixteenth-century politics. And for Fox—and one may infer for Stafford, his translator—there was no biblical precedent greater than the one found in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapter thirteen. In 1534, when Fox was publishing his defense of the supremacy in Latin under the title De Vera Differentia Regiae Potestatis et Ecclesiae, an officially proscribed version of the New Testament in English translated by a fugitive English Lutheran heretic named William Tyndale was receiving wide distribution among the educated. Tyndale's rendering of Romans 13:1-7 had become familiar especially to those who hoped that Henry would institute a reformed church:

Let every soul submit himself unto the authority of the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whoever therefore resisteth power resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not to be feared for good works but for evil. Wilt thou be without fear of the power? Do well then: and so shalt thou be praised for the same. For he is the minister of God for thy wealth. But, and if you do evil then fear: for he beareth not a sword for nought: but is the minister of God to take vengeance on them that do evil. Wherefore ye must needs obey not for fear of vengeance only: but also because of conscience. And even for this cause pay ye tribute. For they are God's ministers, serving for the same purpose.

Give to every man therefore his duetie: Tribute to whom tribute belongeth: honour to whom honour pertaineth. Owe nothing to any man: but to love one another. For he that loveth another fulfilleth the law, for these commandments: *Thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not desire, and so forth (if there be any other commandment), are all comprehended in this saying: Love thine neighbor as thyself.* Love hurteth not his neighbor, therefore is love the fulfilling of the law.<sup>1</sup>

This biblical passage had influenced Christians and its meaning and application had been debated ever since the time of Constantine I in the fourth century, and it has thus affected the lives of millions of people who lived before and after the events of the turbulent sixteenth century. As the most explicit of a small number of New Testament passages describing the Christian's relationship to temporal authority, these few verses were used throughout the sixteenth century in England as an authoritative text for creating government policy and justifying political behavior. St. Paul's injunctions in verses one through seven of that chapter were applied on a continuum from Fox, whose research called upon the subjects of Henry VIII to honor the Tudor monarch above the pope as head of the English Church, to members of the Rump Parliament who more than a hundred years after Fox's death who used the verses to justify regicide. The title of this study suggests that there was a shift in the way English expositors interpreted Romans 13:1-7 between 1532 and 1649. The present study will consider why this change in the reading of St. Paul's injunction occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> William Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament: The "Ploughboy" Edition*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 238. This translation was a revision of Tyndale's earlier edition, first published in 1534.

It was less than a decade after Stafford translated Fox's defense of Henrician supremacy that at least eight hundred men, women, and children fled the country rather than honor Henry's daughter, Mary Tudor (r. 1553-1558), as God's anointed. Before her short monarchy was concluded, she put to death approximately three hundred Protestant believers.<sup>2</sup> One of those exiled during Mary's reign was the chaplain to Edward VI, the Scot John Knox (1514-1572), who used Romans 13 to show that those who resisted the queen were nevertheless praised by the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who damns the foolish ruler.<sup>3</sup> Knox and those who were exiled with him were considered infamous at the Marian court, but the interpretations of Romans they offered through widely-circulated pamphlets progressively gained credibility in more radical circles. Knox's views fell into disrepute during the reign of Elizabeth I, but enjoyed a revival during the reign of Charles I. Thus the possibility of Christian rebellion posed by Knox would not be tested in England until seven decades after his death. The logical implications of active resistance to an ungodly monarch were realized in the seventeenth century by men who accepted Knox's biblical arguments about dealing with idolatrous rulers. They were members of Parliament, purged to less

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<sup>2</sup> Leo F. Solt, Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509-1640 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 63.

<sup>3</sup>John Knox, "The Debate at the General Assembly, June 1564," in On Rebellion. Edited by Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 192.

than one-sixth its normal membership by the ruling military, who tried the Stuart king for his life, and beheaded him at Whitehall in 1649.

The radical developments of the mid-seventeenth century could not have been anticipated by advocates of royal power 120 years earlier. In preparation for a defense of Henry Tudor's supremacy over the English Church in the early 1530s, Fox had interpreted Romans 13 in a straightforward way to argue that the king's power originates with God, who appointed him to office. In Fox's view nobles, common people, and even the clergy must follow Christ's own example and obey the prince without question.<sup>4</sup> Cultural historian Marjo Kaarhnen described this view of the early Tudor period as that of effecting an "untouchable" monarchy.<sup>5</sup> A century later the view of the Independent cleric Jeremiah Burroughs was different. Burroughs promoted popular sovereignty and parliamentary supremacy even before the English Civil War. In 1639, the king's magistrates arrested Burroughs on the charge of sedition for arguing the meaning of Romans 13 with a country parson. Burroughs had maintained that kings were bound by laws and oaths made to the governed, and if they violated these oaths their subjects were not bound to obey rulers who refused to play by the rules.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Edward Fox, *The True Dyfferes Between Ye Regall Power and the Ecclesiastical Power 1548* (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1973), fo. lxix.

<sup>5</sup> Marjo Kaarhnen, *Religious Life and English Culture in the Reformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 440-441.

The foregoing illustrates that St. Paul's exhortation to be subject to the civil authority was interpreted in varied and sometimes apparently contradictory ways throughout the English Reformation.<sup>7</sup> The passage came to be interpreted by imaginative exegetes who widened the possibilities of what St. Paul meant. Alongside the early Tudor interpretation that submission meant unquestioning temporal obedience to higher powers lay the Marian pamphleteers' view that submission was not to be accorded to ungodly rulers who promoted idolatry. The latter view led to exegetes of the seventeenth century who argued for active resistance in removing the rulers who violated the implied covenant with their subjects. The broadening of the interpretation of Romans 13 and its eventual use in advocating active rebellion against monarchs are what drew me to this study. No previous study of the English Reformation has examined the place of Romans 13 in the creative development of the theory of a societal covenant between ruler and ruled, even though its presence in the corpus of significant texts is often acknowledged.<sup>8</sup> Such a study will make an

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<sup>7</sup>As will be seen there are different views among historians as to the length and complexity of the English Reformation. Views of length vary from about fifty to about three hundred years. Revisionists have argued that it is Protestant chauvinism to contend that there is *one* Reformation. They posit several *reformations*. See Rosemary O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation (London: Methuen, 1986); Christopher Haigh, The English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors (London: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Diane Willen, "Revisionism Revised," in Religion and the English People 1500-1640: New Voices New Perspectives, vol. 45, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirkville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 287-294.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, D. Alan Orr, Treason and the State: Law, Politics and Ideology in the English Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186-199; Richard Rex, Henry VIII and the English Reformation (Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 23-30; Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603, 2d ed. British History in Perspective



important contribution to the understanding of the emerging political ideology of Puritanism during the period under consideration. No previous study has closely examined the application of Romans 13 (among various religious opinions) in a specific country over a specific period, particularly when Christianity was so important and so influential in that country's history. Furthermore, considering that England was developing as a European power in the early modern period, and that Britain would go on to become the world's greatest power in the nineteenth century, a study of the use of Romans 13 during a formative time in England's history will make an important contribution to understanding that development.

British historian Rex Pogson described the evolution of the English Reformation as a time of disintegration of consensus concerning the nature of "the true church." The battle for the minds and hearts of the English was waged in debate on the relationship of legal and biblical authority. He further argued that Protestantism in the English Reformation had potential for something radically new because of a powerful objective source for human government. Its leaders compared all legal regulations and governmental institutions against models provided by the Scriptures, considered to be

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(Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 73; Joan O'Donovan, Theology of Law and Authority in the English Reformation (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 107.

the highest authority.<sup>9</sup> I will attempt to discover whether the English Reformation was a debate about relationship between potentially contradictory authorities as Pogson suggests, or if the relationship was settled and the debate revolved around the significance of particular texts. The latter is demonstrated by evidence that interpreters were not political opportunists casting about for some justification for their rebellion, but sincerely religious people who believed in the necessity of biblical justification for political action. If the significance of Romans 13 evolved from obedience to the king, even when he is contradicted by the pope, to the king as a traitor who must be executed, why did this radical change take place? This study will attempt to answer this question.

My thesis is that Romans 13:1-7 was the most authoritative text of any kind on the subject and extent of obedience to the civil powers in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, a country in the throes of radical political and ecclesiastical changes, and was an arbiter to either justify or condemn resistance for influencers who prized biblical precedent. My main purpose in this study will be to explain how and why Romans 13:1-7 came to be used as a resistance text, interpreted with increasingly broad

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<sup>9</sup>Rex Pogson, "God's Law and Man's: Stephen Gardiner and the Problem of Loyalty," in Law and Government Under the Tudors, eds. Claire Cross, David Loades, and J. J. Scarisbrick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 67-68. Pogson argues that the other radically new notion of magisterial Protestantism was that it encouraged secularism by conceding control of the visible church to the ruler.

application during the course of the English Reformation, and in ways that contributed to a weakening of monarchical authority and opened the possibility of overthrowing an alleged tyrant and pursuing a republican experiment. I will suggest that the progressive broadness of the interpretive significance came about because of the increasing precision and influence of a reformed articulation of the Christian commonwealth, in which rulers are to be obeyed in the just enforcement of laws and disobeyed when they exercise injustice. In the case of the latter, when tyranny included idolatry, a godly people were authorized by God to take the mantle of civil authority and turn the sword upon the monarch. My method of study will be to demonstrate the shifting understandings of Romans 13 by an exposition of representative interpretations of the biblical text offered by influential scholars and preachers among English Christians during the sixteenth century. I selected the representatives based on the availability of their expositions of Romans 13, their stature as opinion-makers and influencers both on the subject of obedience and beyond, and upon their originality. These criteria, coupled with the limits of space and time, meant that some important figures in English history were excluded, as, for example, Puritan divines William Ames (1576-1633) and Thomas Hooker (1586-1647). The epoch under consideration is 1532 to 1649, but the present study will consider expositions of Romans 13 from as early as 1497 that influenced the English Reformation. I have elected to study this era because it was during this time that an urgent need arose in England to understand the limits of civil

disobedience and the individual conscience. This need had not arisen as fully before the sixteenth century when people all over Europe were forced to make such choices, and provided the basis for a social experiment in republicanism in the seventeenth century. The experiment began in 1649 when the interregnum used Romans 13 as a test for godly rule, but the basic arguments for such a test were developed in the sixteenth century. Early in the sixteenth century there arose expositors who, even decades before the break with Rome, influenced the earliest Henrician reforms and the exaltation of Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the English Church, as well as the biblical faith of laypeople. The biblicism that was fostered in the sixteenth century also provided a basis for the English Civil Wars, the execution of Charles I, and the interpretations of Romans 13, which influenced these unprecedented events in English history.

Some who had agreed with Henry's original opposition to Protestantism, including their characteristic private interpretation of the Scriptures, later used an appeal to biblical texts as authority in a fashion similar to the Protestants. They cited Romans 13 as a major New Testament passage in defense of Henry's claim to be Head of the English Church as early as 1530. This would not be remarkable in a debate over canon law, but the Romans 13 text was part of a collection prepared for the intellectual armament of king and court in the domestic defense of the royal supremacy. The manuscript is available for perusal in the British Library, cataloged as Collectanea satis

copiosa, ex sacris scriptis et authoribus Catholicis de regia et ecclesiastica potestate.<sup>10</sup>

Fox and, to a lesser extent, the conservative bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner (1483-1555), oversaw the construction of this scrapbook of supporting precedents that included historical accounts of conflicts between English monarchs and the pope, relevant legal examples, and biblical accounts from Old Testament narrative literature touching upon kingship and New Testament didactic literature that deals with the Christian's relation to civil authority.

The “Collectanea” was assembled to orient Henry VIII and his subjects to the proper intellectual arguments in favor of the “imperium,” the right of kings to rule an independent English church, beyond the control of foreign bishops. This manuscript served as theoretical basis for Parliament's 1533 Act in Restraint of Appeals, which historian Leo F. Solt has called the most important legislation passed by the Reformation Parliament.<sup>11</sup> Fox found in Romans 13 a useful text for support of the *imperium*, by arguing that St. Paul had advocated the king's authority over both the civil and ecclesiastical spheres.<sup>12</sup> In an examination of influences on the eve of the English Reformation, I will also consider the possible effect of published interpretations of Romans 13 on later reformers and even on the arguments of the king's advocates

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<sup>10</sup>British Library manuscript, Cleopatra E 6, 16-135. Hereafter referred to as Collectanea.

<sup>11</sup>Leo F. Solt, Church and State in Early Modern England (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>12</sup>Fox, The True Dyfferes, fo. lxviii.

penned by English humanist and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, John Colet (1467-1519) and by exiled Oxford scholar and translator William Tyndale (1494-1536), even though the former had died by 1519 and the latter was considered an outlaw and a heretic by the king in 1532. Tyndale interpreted St. Paul as teaching passive resistance<sup>13</sup> to the civil authorities and his New Testament later became the basis for Bible translations approved by the Crown. Despite Tyndale's theological vindication of the supremacy and his influence on vernacular translations that served to support it, Henry considered Tyndale's Lutheran views to be heresy and his translation activities to be a threat to his authority and to the English church. Tyndale's open opposition to the annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine probably did not help his standing with the monarch either.<sup>14</sup>

Tyndale and the early apologists of regal supremacy sought to employ the Pauline text to argue that the king was not under jurisdiction of the pope with regard to issues whose resolution lay entirely within the realm and province of the English

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<sup>13</sup> In this study I will use the terms "non-resistance" and "passive resistance" interchangeably to speak of the view that holds Christian obedience is due to the de facto ruler. I found no sixteenth- or seventeenth-century expositor who held that there no imaginable grounds to disobey, or that one should obey the de facto ruler even when he or she contradicted God's higher command.

<sup>14</sup>William Tyndale, The Obedience of a Christian Man (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1970), fo. xli. Henry found Tyndale's opposition to his annulment from Catherine and his Lutheran views on the doctrine of justification by faith to be odious. It was also Sir Thomas More's hatred of the heretical Tyndale that ultimately led to the latter's apprehension and execution on the Continent. See Brian Moynahan, God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

monarch. They stressed the obligation of the Christian to obey the prince, who was accountable to God for his subjects' temporal and spiritual welfare. It seems a mighty leap in one generation from Tyndales's passive obedience to the radically active views of the so-called Genevan pamphleteers, the so-called Marian Exiles, a generation later. Exiled leaders such as Knox, and Knox's fellow pastors of the English congregation in Geneva, Christopher Goodman (1520-1603), and Anthony Gilby (1510-1585) used Romans 13 as an authoritative text that enjoined obedience to "godly" (defined as fulfilling the divinely appointed function of magistrate) rulers and demonstrated from this text the obligation actively to resist tyrants. The Genevan pamphleteers were the intellectual leaders of a political, social, and ecclesiastical experiment that was conducted on the Continent in the context of a community of English expatriates.<sup>15</sup>

The aspect of the experiment that dealt with civil disobedience at first appeared to be a failure, but would later shape the thinking of many Puritans in terms of their relation to king and state.<sup>16</sup> Solt notes that the notion of active resistance survived

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<sup>15</sup> In using this rather imprecise popular term, I will not include John Ponet since he apparently does not have either Genevan connections, nor was he involved in the English ecclesiological controversies during his short sojourn on the Continent.

<sup>16</sup> Puritanism was a movement born out of dissatisfaction with the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. The definition of Puritan is much debated, with some scholars advocating theological distinctions, while others stress sociological commonalities among those who thought of themselves as Puritans. I will refer to Puritans in this study in the following way: Puritans were those who wished to rid the Church of England of medieval Catholic accretions and to see the church reformed along more Continental models similar to the Reformed churches observed by Marian Exiles. They shared the Calvinistic theology of the Elizabethan Church, but in the 1580s some Puritans began to advocate presbyterian models of church government, and in the 1590s some began to favor congregational models. Eventually, in the seventeenth century, the movement splintered over how the Church of England was to be governed and some gave

through Elizabethan times and was used by Calvinists opposed to the Stuart monarchy in the 1640s. Puritan poet John Milton (1608-1674) acknowledged indebtedness to Knox and Goodman in his The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, written in 1649 in defense of the execution of Charles I.<sup>17</sup>

I will suggest that sixteenth-century Protestant exegetes, concerned primarily with the complete reform of the English Church, anticipated later dissenting and evangelical movements. They also used the Pauline text in such a way as to influence Lockean and Enlightenment models that, in turn, influenced the republicanism and liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In any event, this study will identify these influential sixteenth-century exegetes, and consider what may be discovered about their hermeneutical approach together with the interpretive exigence<sup>18</sup> that caused them to examine the text of Romans 13 more closely and seriously than most medieval and Reformation commentators. The initial survey of these documents suggests that there is also an intriguing irony in the

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up on the Church of England entirely, becoming Independents and Separatists. Diana Newton, Papists, Protestants and Puritans, 1559-1714 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8-9; Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 26-28.

<sup>17</sup>Solt, 66; John Milton, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This work was originally published in 1649. Milton writes, "But to any civil power unaccountable, unquestionable, and not to be resisted, no not in wickedness, and violent actions, how can we submit as free men? There is no power but of God, says Paul."

<sup>18</sup>An exigence is the pressing issue that compels the author of a text to write persuasively to members of the affected community. For an explanation of the importance of exigence in interpretation, see George Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 148-151.



radical employment of this vital text that places these exegetes at odds with many of their spiritual descendants of the twenty-first century, who tend to question civil authority very little or not at all, and who appeal to the same Romans 13 for justification for their unquestioning obedience to the powers that be.

In examining the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 in the period from 1532 to 1649, I intend to demonstrate that influential interpreters broadened the scope of the application of the text to permit active civil disobedience and, eventually, the overthrow of the monarch. By considering the confluence of hermeneutical approach and societal exigence, I will show that the epistle offered a primary authoritative text in defining church-state relations leading to reform of the English Church and to theories about a covenant between ruler and ruled that would form a basis for republicanism as it eventually emerged in Britain and the United States.

Although there have not been any previous studies that specifically deal with the interpretation of Romans 13 and its comparative use in the English Reformation among the main religious disputants, there have been explanations of its significance that are included in broader discussions about the issue of obedience, and the Romans passage is often mentioned alongside a number of other relevant Old and New Testament texts. A notable exception is the excellent article by Glen Bowman on the views of Elizabethan

Catholics concerning Romans 13.<sup>19</sup> Discussions of these texts and their contributions are usually located within books and articles that describe the obedience doctrines of Tudor and Stuart England. Interest in the theme of obedience—one that was ubiquitous in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—has increased among historians toward the end of the twentieth century and in these first years of the twenty-first century.

In the 1920s, British historian J. W. Allen suggested that Martin Luther's theology was too non-systematic to have seriously affected any political philosophies, particularly absolutist ones that began to emerge in the sixteenth century. Holding Luther to be unoriginal but an influence on other theologians who, in turn, developed more radical political philosophies, Allen was skeptical of the Reformers' incipient views of passive resistance derived from such passages as Romans 13. According to Allen, reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and Tyndale all agreed that obedience to civil authorities was required and that resistance was excluded unless one was commanded to do that which was contrary to the Word of God. In case of the latter, prayer and flight are permitted, but in no case is forcible resistance allowed.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Allen

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<sup>19</sup> Glen Bowman, "Elizabethan Catholics and Romans 13: A Chapter in the History of Political Polemic," *Journal of Church and State* 47, no. 3 (summer 2005): 531-44.

<sup>20</sup>J. W. Allen, "The Political Conceptions of Luther," in *Tudor Studies: Presented by the Board of Studies in History in the University of London to Albert Frederick Pollard Being the Work of Twelve of his Colleagues and Pupils*, ed. R. W. Seton-Watson (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 90-93. This work was originally published in 1924. Among those whom Allen discussed, who found scriptural alternatives to the positions of early reformers, were John Knox and the Anabaptists. Allen wrote that

held that, despite the defense that their views were “biblical,” these Reformers could have found a different view in the Scriptures, just as later Protestants had managed to do so, thus implying that interpretations of passages such as Romans 13 came more out of political necessity than disciplined biblical exegesis.<sup>21</sup>

Writing just after the Second World War, British historian E. G. Rupp considered Romans 13 the Reformers’ central political text, but he saw it as substantiating a hierarchical structure that prevailed in Europe from Late Antiquity to the Enlightenment. Rupp held that this hierarchy was based on Old Testament political and social models.<sup>22</sup> Despite the existence of this long tradition, Rupp intended to demonstrate the profound influence of “theological, liturgical, and religious” ideas on political institutions and policies in sixteenth-century England, and secondarily to rehabilitate the Reformers themselves. His exigency for writing The English Protestant Tradition provides the reason for the scant attention given to the Reformers and their texts at the time of his writing. Rupp says that British historians hostile to the English Reformation were so much more comfortable with non-theological influences in the

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Luther had only a slight influence on the English Reformation. Though he mentions Tyndale in this article, he does not take into account Luther’s influence on the translator of the English Bible. For an argument similar to Allen’s and a discussion of how Knox and others of Calvin’s followers broadened the latter’s political teaching to allow for a more innovative approach to obedience, see Henri Strohl, “Le Droit à la Résistance d’après les Conceptions Protestantes,” *Revue d’histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 10:2 (1930), 126-144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>E. G. Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition (Mainly in the Reign of Henry VIII)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 74.

sixteenth century that the Reformers themselves, as well as their theological arguments, were becoming peripheral to the Reformation.<sup>23</sup> He traced the marginalization of religious causes of the English Reformation to the emergence of the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement, which called upon the English to follow the unbroken line of Catholicism rather than the Protestant reformers, who they maintained had defective characters, devoted as they were to individualism that promoted schism rather than reform.<sup>24</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine that one could be cynical of a religious movement officially created to achieve political ends, but in the 1960s A. G. Dickens published his magisterial The English Reformation, in which he contended that there was more afoot during the Henrician reforms than religious change for the convenience of the monarch. Dickens held that the English Reformation captured the population rapidly due to dissatisfaction with the medieval church. It had a head start in being able to build around the nucleus provided by Lollardy. According to Dickens, official reform was not merely an imposition of Protestantism from above, and historians who hold this view are guilty of reductionism. The English Church was profoundly influenced by continental reform movements, which challenged Henry's conservatism at the right

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., xiii-xiv. The Oxford Movement sought to trace the Church of England back to apostolic roots.

<sup>24</sup>Rosemary O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation (London: Methuen, 1986), 86-88.

time and made significant inroads into the faith of the populace, beginning in the southeastern part of the country.<sup>25</sup>

Dickens laid great stress upon the Bible being produced in the vernacular, an event that came about initially through the labors of Tyndale and the demands of a readership, and in spite of the wishes of the monarchy, whose agents continued to dog Tyndale's steps to his death. It was in the pages of the English Bible that one read of the need to obey the civil authorities in a context that did not seem to make exceptions for members of the clergy.<sup>26</sup> The scriptures in the vernacular, indeed, served as an introduction to St. Paul's teaching for a populace raised in a Medieval Church that did not emphasize Pauline didactic literature.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, Dickens made it plausible that the English Reformation was an increasingly popular movement of sincerely religious people who accepted the teaching of the Scriptures as the highest authority. According to Dickens, biblical texts such as Romans 13:1-7 would have been taken seriously by all those who embraced the Reformation, from merchants and peasants to the believing nobility. Even if one takes the opposing view to Dickens,

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<sup>25</sup>A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation, 2d ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 22. Originally published in 1964.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 121, 159. Simon Fish made the objection in Supplication of Beggars that the clergy feared the Bible in the vernacular because common people would read that Christ submitted himself to temporal authority. See Simon Fish, "Simon Fish on Clerical Vices," in The Reformation in England to the Accession of Elizabeth I, eds. A. G. Dickens and Dorothy Carr (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), 18.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

articulated in the 1990s by revisionist historian Christopher Haigh, that the Reformation was imposed from above and that the country only became a Protestant nation by a slow process,<sup>28</sup> it should be admitted that the official Reformation was successful in using the newly translated Bible as authoritative material for inculcating the value of Christian obedience.

Several researchers have moved in the direction of seeing the function of Romans 13 in the English Reformation as supporting the very structure of national life through recognition of the Tudor monarch as God's anointed. In 1976, American political philosopher Edward O. Smith, Jr. produced a study that examined the progressive and sustained growth of the prestige of kings and queens in the Tudor era. He called this phenomenon the "cult of the monarchy." Smith said that the Tudor kingship lent itself to a mystique of which the reign of Elizabeth I provided the ultimate picture: "The official concept of kingship which emerged under Elizabeth was then a cluster of ideas, attitudes, and values which formed a normative intellectual system plus a set of non-rational actions and behavior patterns which, when taken together, formed the *royal mystique*."<sup>29</sup> Smith found within the coronation and subsequent Accession Day

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<sup>28</sup>Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 15-16.

<sup>29</sup>Edward O. Smith, "Crown and Commonwealth: A Study in the Official Elizabethan Doctrine of the Prince," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 66, no. 8 (1976): 6. The emphasis at the end of this quotation is mine.

celebrations,<sup>30</sup> and in collected exemplar sermons such as the *Homily of Obedience*, the crucial public rituals enshrining the monarch, in this case Elizabeth, as the “Lord’s Anointed” to whom is owed obedience and to whom all temporal judgment is deferred. Central to all attendant rituals was the authoritative text, Romans 13.<sup>31</sup> Smith also produced a companion article that more closely examined sermons preached in the presence of the queen at court. According to Smith, these sermons reflected the themes raised in the *Homily of Obedience*. Smith considered how the homilies built a theology of kingship, but frequently found that the solution to the problem of an evil monarch remained unresolved.<sup>32</sup>

Finnish cultural historian Marjo Kaarhnen observes how the Tudor monarchy was the culmination of development along a continuum that began in the Middle Ages with elective kingship. According to Kaarhnen, Romans 13 was selected because it promoted the cultic nature of the monarchy by providing the New Testament basis for the “untouchability” of the monarch. That is, even if the king or queen should prove to be evil, he or she must be obeyed. Since both the scenario of the just and that of the evil monarch come from God, any rebellion is directed not against the king, but against God himself, because when a monarch is evil the subjects deserve his or her rule for sinful

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 19. Accession Day was celebrated on November 17.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 18-20, 28-30.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 29; idem, “The Elizabethan Doctrine of the Prince as Reflected in the Sermons of the Episcopacy, 1559-1603,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 28 (1964): 1-18.

national behavior. To be a rebel, even one who has just grievances, is to declare oneself to be a child of the Antichrist.<sup>33</sup>

With Protestants Edward VI or Elizabeth I on the throne, it would have been easier for a Protestant subject to accept the ruler as God's anointed. Through a series of articles on civil disobedience in the Tudor era written in the late 1970s and early 1980s, historian Richard L. Greaves explored the theories of active political resistance developed by Knox, Goodman, and John Ponet, formerly Edward's bishop of Rochester, during the reign of Mary Tudor, when she attempted to bring back Roman Catholicism as the faith of the English Church. Knox, Goodman, and Ponet were among the approximately 800 English Protestants who fled to the Continent during Mary's ascendancy. Most English Protestants did not exercise the option to flee, and most survived Mary's tenure although as mentioned above, about 300 died as martyrs.<sup>34</sup> Greaves held that the Marian monarchy created a societal dilemma that brought into question the incipient Protestant teachings about the necessity of obedience to the monarch. He saw three new alternatives that developed in the ferment: First, there was what can be described as a moderate Calvinist perspective based on Genevan reformer

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<sup>33</sup>Kaarhnen, 24.

<sup>34</sup>Richard L. Greaves, "Concepts of Political Obedience in Late Tudor England: Conflicting Perspectives" The Journal of British Studies 22 no. 1 (1982): 23-26; see also, idem, "Calvinism, Democracy, and the Political Thought of John Knox," Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research I (1977): 81-91; idem, "Traditionalism and the Seeds of Revolution in the Social Principles of the Geneva Bible," Sixteenth Century Journal 7:2 (1976): 94-109; idem, "John Knox, the Reformed Tradition, and the Development of Resistance Theory." The Journal of Modern History 48:3 (1976): 1-36.



John Calvin's notion that lesser magistrates may recognize and depose evil rulers. The marginalia in the popular Geneva Bible of 1560 preserved this view. Second, Greaves noted the view of the Marian pamphleteers Knox, Ponet, and Goodman, that espoused active political resistance as the obligation of the subjects to depose an ungodly ruler for ostensibly promoting idolatry. Oxford political theorist Joan L. O'Donovan observed that each of the three pamphleteers insisted that the meaning of Romans 13 must be controlled by an understanding of Peter's example in Acts 4 in which he says that he cannot be silent about the message of Christ because he is compelled to obey God rather than men. O'Donovan says that the pamphleteers' hermeneutics were driven by the hierarchy of laws in which God's higher law circumscribes the Christian's duty to obey civil authorities.<sup>35</sup> The third view that Greaves discussed was that of the Catholic Rheims New Testament and Douai Bible that held ecclesiastical authority to be the highest allegiance, thus implying a spiritual basis for overthrowing a Protestant monarch like Elizabeth I. In all of these positions, fresh interpretations of Romans 13:1-7 emerged. Elizabethan Protestants protested against what they saw as Catholic advocacy of tyrannicide and rejected the radical Protestant approach of Knox, Ponet, and Goodman. Greaves makes the case that all of these decisions were based on

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<sup>35</sup>Joan L. O'Donovan, Theology of Law and Authority in the English Reformation (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 107.

exigencies and came about as an accident of royal descent.<sup>36</sup> That is, the fact that the Protestant Edward was followed by the Catholic Mary, and then by the Protestant Elizabeth with the Protestant cause surviving on a razor's edge, provided the fertile ground for the development of an active resistance theory even though it was eventually rejected.<sup>37</sup>

Historian Dan G. Danner reflects a similar view in a 1977 article that distinguishes between the views of the three aforementioned Marian pamphleteers and speculates about their influences. Danner points out the uniqueness of English Protestantism in producing views of active resistance and tyrannicide, and speculates that this came about because of the unique political situation many English Protestants found themselves in during the exile.<sup>38</sup> Danner offers several additional reasons as to why the theories of active resistance fell into disuse upon the accession of Elizabeth. One had to do with the departure of Knox for Scotland and Goodman's recantation of his former positions on tyrannicide and the rule of women. Danner also points out that rebellion never was an active option in the reign of the Protestant Elizabeth. Lastly,

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<sup>36</sup>Greaves, Concepts, 33-34.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Dan G. Danner, "Christopher Goodman and the English Protestant Tradition of Civil Disobedience," Sixteenth Century Journal 8 no. 3 (1977): 72-73.

Danner points out that Elizabeth was better at the political game than some “Puritans” played so well and she left no openings to those who wanted more significant reforms.<sup>39</sup>

More than seventy years after J. W. Allen minimized Luther’s impact on the English Reformation, Cambridge Research Fellow Richard Rex suggested that the German reformer’s greatest contribution to the English was the most important and urgent objective of the Henrician reform: obedience.<sup>40</sup> How could one whom Henry apparently considered a heretic to his dying day have such an impact? Rex’s answer is manifold. First, he affirms Geoffrey Elton’s findings that Thomas Cromwell, as Henry’s chancellor, worked behind the scenes to create a program of sermons and broadsides that taught the message of the necessity of obedience to the king.<sup>41</sup> Cromwell used whatever materials proved useful to promote the king’s supremacy. Second, Rex shows that the Lutheran obedience teaching was mediated by Tyndale, himself the king’s enemy but one whom Cromwell would have brought in as an ally had Tyndale not condemned the king’s annulment of the marriage to Catherine. But while Rex avoids Allen’s failure in not mentioning the influence Tyndale exercised in the area of a

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 73. It is unclear how Danner defines “Puritan” when he speaks of those who “waited for openings”: “Violent revolution lost its significance in Elizabeth’s *via media*, and Puritans waited for openings, some of which never came; more were created by persistent divines who no longer worried about Spanish invasion.” Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Richard Rex, “The Crisis of Obedience: God’s Word and Henry’s Reformation,” The Historical Journal 39 no. 4 (1996): 863.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 864. Also see Geoffrey R. Elton, Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 193.

Christian's obedience to the monarch, neither does Rex move hastily to have the translator of the English Bible appear too early on the scene.

Rex considers the old story that Ann Boleyn may have affected Henry by recommending Tyndale's Obedience of a Christian Man to be unlikely due to Henry's hatred of Tyndale and his rejection of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith to which Tyndale's work is so closely tied.<sup>42</sup> Rex avoids the pitfalls of those who make Tyndale one of the conscious and early influences by insisting that he did not affect adoption of the supremacy, but that the adoption of supremacy made Cromwell and his assistants search for resources that would underline the Christian subjects' biblical obligation to obey the monarch. So, in Rex's view, Cromwell first made obedience to the monarch the project, then searched for precedents such as those provided by Tyndale. Since the unique Lutheran teaching was that obedience to the prince was owed on the basis of the fourth commandment, the command to honor father and mother, the king's authority was derived from divine law.<sup>43</sup> Rex points out that obedience was both the means and the end of Henrician policy at this time. Driven by this need for substantial precedent to support the royal supremacy, Thomas Cromwell presented the view of the king as the *pater familia* of England based on Luther's exegesis of the Exodus 12 passage. But the earliest passage to which Luther—and Edward Fox,

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<sup>42</sup>Rex, 871-872.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 866-867.

who worked to establish a precedent for the royal supremacy—turned was Romans 13, and not Exodus 12 as the definitive abstract statement supporting a number of concrete Old Testament narrative examples.<sup>44</sup>

A fresh examination of the significant expositions of the *locus classicus* of the Christian's relation to the civil authority in Reformation England seems to be in order, especially in light of the increasing interest in the theme of obedience in the English Reformation among historians since the 1920s. Biblical precedent was of supreme importance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century politics, and Romans 13:1-7 was the primary abstract text used both to justify the king's or queen's supremacy and to deny his or her right to govern. It was employed both to render the monarch's authority as untouchable and to declare the ruler bound by laws and oaths made to the ruled. There is a continuum along which the more radical interpretations emerged. In this study I will consider how and why that happened, especially among people who held the New Testament in high regard, and who generally believed in a single literal (or plain) meaning. The study will begin with a consideration of existing findings and interpretations of the event (or events) called the English Reformation.

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<sup>44</sup>Richard Rex, Henry VIII and the English Reformation (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 24-25.

# CHAPTER 1 - The Rise of Reformation Exegesis

## Introduction

The English Reformation, like its continental counterparts, was a primarily religious movement initiated and developed to improve and reorganize the Church by attempting to divest it of perceived non-apostolic accretions and return it to a form of Christianity more consistent with that pictured in the New Testament.<sup>45</sup> Though the movement was principally religious, from time to time leading political figures helped its progress. For those who were anxious to promote reform from conviction, the advocacy the Crown's patronage was at first welcomed<sup>46</sup> but eventually this approach created a number of difficulties in church-state relations that required delicate responses designed to salvage Reformation gains and address political expediencies.<sup>47</sup> Rulers who had various levels of enthusiasm for religious reform provided political

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<sup>45</sup> A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation, 2d ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>46</sup> An example of this is when Thomas Cromwell apparently used his considerable influence to rid Henry VIII of his second wife, Anne Boleyn, and himself of Anne's ambitious relatives. Thomas Cranmer, Henry's Archbishop of Canterbury, feared that the ascendancy of Jane Seymour, Anne's former maid of honor and Henry's new love interest, would mean serious setbacks for the reforms he had planned with Cromwell that had been previously aided by Anne's patronage. It was the occasion for Cranmer's famous letter to Henry VIII, written May 3, 1536, of which barrister and Cranmer biographer Jasper Ridley rightly said, "Cranmer's aim was not to save the Queen, but the Reformation." Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 104.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

leadership during this era: Henry VIII was certainly not an enthusiastic supporter of doctrinal reform, but he employed those who did support it to achieve his own ends vis-à-vis the supremacy question. Edward VI leaned toward Protestantism, but never reached majority and had guardians of questionable abilities and motivations. Mary I was a reactionary hostile to Protestant reform. Elizabeth I was more concerned with unifying the body politic than she was with a church purified of accretions.

Historians are generally in agreement that the official Reformation introduced by the Crown and supported through unprecedented legislation by the Parliament either fueled or paralleled the popular devotion that grew during the remainder of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, the question remains, was the English Reformation imposed upon the English people from “above” by those who sought to increase the power of the monarch or did religious forces on the Continent influence and inspire a growing Protestant population in England that pressed for further religious reforms out of genuine conviction? Just how popular was the English Protestant movement? These questions have fueled debate about the nature of the English Reformation for the last forty years.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dickens, 380-391; Rosemary O’ Day, The Debate on the English Reformation (London: Methuen, 1986), 133-165; Christopher Haigh, The English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society Under the Tudors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 15-16; Richard Rex, Henry VIII and the English Reformation (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1993), 3.

## The Henrician Reformation and the Scriptures

The immediate cause of the official Reformation was the need of Henry VIII to annul his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn. Henry's twin reasons for pursuing annulment were the alleged inherent sinfulness of the union to Catherine, arranged by Henry's father, and the more politically expedient reason of obtaining a male heir to the throne. Not all scholars are convinced that Henry really believed the former reason, but he argued it on the basis of passages from the Mosaic laws, which prohibited the marrying of near relatives, in this case his brother's wife.<sup>49</sup> Whether Henry and his advisors were correct or incorrect in their interpretation of these passages is not as important to the present study as the fact that the question involved the necessity of the king's obedience to the Scriptures, based on proper interpretation that was not entirely entrusted to the Roman Church's wisdom. Richard Rex says that Henry had two options open to him: either to examine closely the original dispensation that allowed him to marry Catherine and find some technicality that would disallow it, or to argue that the biblical passages that prohibited such a marriage were so clear no pope could issue a dispensation to permit the marriage in the first place. Henry preferred the latter route and pursued it without impugning the original papal authority.<sup>50</sup> The pope's refusal to authorize either a divorce or an annulment for

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<sup>49</sup> Lev 18:16; 20:21.

<sup>50</sup> Rex, 8.



the English monarch pushed Henry to act in what he perceived to be his country's (and his) best interests. Henry cast off the authority of the papal see and advocated the king's supremacy over the English church, whose spiritual leader, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, eventually set aside the marriage to Catherine on May 23, 1533.

Before the break with Rome, Henry attempted to persuade and pressure the pope to set aside the unlawful marriage to Catherine. At first he used the services of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1475-1530) to persuade the pope, and later sought to convince him through opinions offered by university faculties. After Wolsey had been dismissed Catherine had brought her own appeal to Rome. Henry was summoned, but the king instructed his new representatives at Rome to forestall proceedings at the Rota,<sup>51</sup> where he had been cited to appear. During the postponement the king's deputies were to do the work of lobbyists, twisting the arms of canons and university masters in an attempt to muster support for Henry.<sup>52</sup> At home and abroad, the king's agents engaged in research designed to provide precedents in favor of Henry's arguments, particularly that the King of England enjoyed imperial status, thus making

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<sup>51</sup> The Rota was the appellate tribunal of the Roman Church that dealt with issues such as those connected to the annulment of marriage. It derived its name from the round room in which the judges convened.

<sup>52</sup> Graham Nicholson, "The Act of Appeals and the English Reformation," in Law and Government Under the Tudors: Essays Presented to Sir Geoffrey Elton, Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge on the Occasion of His Retirement, eds. Claire Cross, David Loades, and J. J. Scarisbrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.

him immune from papal jurisdiction.<sup>53</sup> Though they had only limited success convincing scholars on the Continent, these researchers found a number of domestic historical precedents that supported the assertion of the rights of English kings against papal interference in the English Church. By the autumn of 1530, Henry had decided that the issue of annulment would be decided by the Archbishop of Canterbury and before English clergy. Thomas Cromwell, using his favored status as one of the king's closest advisers, began to publish works in defense of the royal supremacy based upon the findings of researchers appointed by the king. The most complete defense of the king's supremacy extant is Fox's De Vera Differentia. The historical and biblical (including Romans 13) bases for the supremacy identified by Fox and his team of scholars provided the evidence Cromwell needed to advance the king's agenda.<sup>54</sup> One of Fox's scholarly colleagues was Stephen Gardiner (1497-1555), who later produced his own eloquent defense of the royal supremacy entitled De Vera Obedientia in 1535, though during Mary's reign two decades later Gardiner made a number of informal retractions, no doubt from embarrassment about his earlier beliefs that were not in keeping with Mary's desire to bring the monarchy into submission to Rome.

Home in England, armed with biblical and medieval precedents, Cromwell began to pen a torrent of legislation for what would later be called the "Reformation

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. See also Haigh, 99-101

<sup>54</sup> Rex, 23-24. See also Nicholson, 25-30.

Parliament," which had been convened in 1529, and would act repeatedly in support of the king's religious program. Cromwell resurrected two fourteenth-century ideas: *praemunire*, which prohibited clerical appeals to a foreign bishop and that which was later called Erastianism, which is the theory that the secular State is all-powerful and the Church is subject to it, deriving its powers from the State, on earth. The latter draws its name from the Swiss theologian who championed it in the sixteenth century, Thomas Erastus (1524-1583). But political theories that comprise Erastianism are much older. Two centuries after his death medieval theologian and medical doctor Marsiglio of Padua (1290-1343), who held that ecclesiastical authority was subordinate to temporal authority, was one of the most widely regarded Erastians. Cromwell even paid for the publication of Marsiglio's works in English. An extended series of parliamentary acts followed which at first limited and later abolished papal authority. The authority of the papal see was replaced by the supremacy of the Crown, which then reaped the harvest of ecclesiastical taxation.<sup>55</sup>

Cromwell further enriched the Crown and rewarded the king's friends through the dissolution of the English monasteries. An Act of Parliament detailed the process of dissolution that not only vested all monastic properties in the king, but also all incomes, rents, tithes, and annuities tied to those properties. English monasteries also

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<sup>55</sup> Dickens, A. G. and Dorothy Carr, eds., The Reformation in England to the Accession of Elizabeth I (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), 6-7. Plate and bullion were gold and silver in bars or other uncoined forms that were acquired as a result of tithes or gifts.

held plate, bullion, and other treasures that passed to the Crown.<sup>56</sup> The dissolution of monasteries was approved by Parliament in 1536 and 1538, based on visitation reports provided by Cromwell.<sup>57</sup> These visitations were made possible by the 1534 Act Annexing First Fruits and Tenths to the Crown,<sup>58</sup> and were reported with a full accounting of the monasteries' assets to parliament in Cromwell's *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535.<sup>59</sup>

When Parliament adjourned in 1536, much of the Henrician phase of the official reform of the English Church was complete, but one should not mistake this flurry of activity in establishing the king's supremacy for full-blown Protestant Reformation.<sup>60</sup> It is reductionistic to place too much emphasis on the political activities that eventually made room for Protestantism. Henry's highly-focused effort to obtain a divorce as the effective cause of the Reformation cannot be dismissed as insignificant, but neither should the divorce and royal supremacy be considered the *raison d'être* for the Reformation that occurred. Henry had employed Lutheran sympathizers like

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>58</sup> Act Annexing First Fruits and Tenths to the Crown, 1534, Statutes of the Realm, 26 Hen. 8, c. 3. See especially paragraph IX.

<sup>59</sup> Dickens and Carr, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Henry's Reformation was not only an act of state and there is evidence the king sought to advance religious devotion in England. Despite this, the supremacy created policies against popular expressions of religion as in the suppression of the cult of the saints. See Rex, 72-103.

Cromwell to accomplish the supremacy, but the king remained conservative in his own theological views. Convinced Lutherans may have favored Henry's religious agenda for creating a climate for the eventual realization of more far-reaching reforms, and some may not have grasped until the appearance of the draconian *Six Articles* in 1540 that Henry was anything but Protestant, but they believed that the kind of Reformation they longed for was not political but doctrinal. What A. G. Dickens termed "anti-papal and anti-sacerdotal" forces that supported the supremacy were becoming entrenched in England after 1530.<sup>61</sup> Cromwell provided the English with a legal Bible in the vernacular containing passages that urged them to be obedient to the prince. Henry attempted to enact reactionary programs in the last six years of his reign, but he could not turn back the clock of reform, nor guarantee that his successors would not be Protestants. Thus, Henry's political agenda gave the Lutherans breathing space. Many among the ruling classes were being converted to Protestantism as were many from other walks of life in London and the southeast of England, but a vision of Henry's Christian commonwealth did not compel them as much as solafidianism.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Dickens, English Reformation, 128. It is most accurate to refer to these early English Protestants as Lutherans. Cromwell himself demonstrated not only sympathy for Luther's teaching, but sought political ties with German Lutheran princes. See *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Conyers Read, Social and Political Forces in the English Reformation (Houston: The Elsevier Press, 1953), 15-16; T. M. Parker, The English Reformation to 1558 (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 119-120.

## **Reformation and the People: Influence of Anti-clerical Feeling and Lollardy**

England was a nation both prepared and unprepared for the coming of the Reformation movement. The confluence of a number of circumstances demonstrated the readiness of the country for the possibility of reform. The competence of the clergy and the level of dissatisfaction expressed through anti-clerical feeling and the lingering presence of Lollardy prepared England for the possibility of Protestantism, and space was made for its growth through the king's pursuit of supremacy over the English Church. But the fact that the cyclothymic monarch was not interested in extensive doctrinal reform, and that there was some resistance to change as demonstrated through Pilgrimage of Grace<sup>63</sup> showed that the English Reformation would either be snuffed out or develop quite differently than continental models. Among the educated, humanism's influence in the early decades of the sixteenth century created a demand for objective documentation of church doctrine and polity and a hope for enlightened political rule and ecclesiastical reform based upon training in the philosophy of Christ.

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<sup>63</sup> The Pilgrimage of Grace was a series of uprisings that exploded in northern England in October 1536 in response to a number of issues related to interference on the part of the central government. Land enclosure, lack of circulated coin in the North, and measures approved by the Reformation Parliament were among the participants' chief grievances. They were led by Yorkshireman Robert Aske, who declared the rebellion a pilgrimage. Aske called for restoration of monasteries and papal supremacy in England. The uprisings were over by the end of 1536 when promises of concession from the Crown were accepted by leaders of the rebellion. When these unfulfilled promises prompted further uprisings in 1537, the government used military force, torture, and execution to destroy the movement. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking, 2003), 195, for a concise discussion of the Pilgrimage of Grace.

The objective basis of all of this had its locus in the literature of the ancient world, but the philosophy of Christ could only be gained from a study of the New Testament in the original Greek by employing a plain and historical method.

The corruption and incompetence of the clergy contributed to anti-clerical feeling. Though Christopher Haigh is probably right when he asserts that the clergy of the English Church were not as corrupt as their counterparts on the Continent,<sup>64</sup> there are still many well-documented cases of pluralism and absenteeism among members of the priesthood. There was enough corruption to sustain a fairly widespread anti-clerical feeling among the population based on a number of factors.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, there were a greater percentage of educated and literate people in England than at any other time in memory. Thomas More estimated that literacy was relatively high, perhaps above fifty percent for men. Reformation historian David Pill speculated that more educated laypeople in the parish translated into greater scrutiny of the parish priest—and resulting dissatisfaction. Educated parishioners were more likely to report confidently the priest's missteps. A number of priests were installed, but the vast majority of them had little or no competent preparation for their offices.<sup>66</sup> The small proportion of formally educated priests raises the question of whether or not training

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<sup>64</sup>Haigh, 12.

<sup>65</sup>Pill, 26-29.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

was adequate to serve a pious yet theologically diverse populace. The English were as well known for having a wide spectrum of religious opinions as they were for their devotion.<sup>67</sup> This could have been for lack of an effective clergy as much as for independent thinking. Protestantism inherently placed greater demands on clergy by its insistence on literacy for all, primarily to facilitate reading of the Scriptures. But wider literacy among the English also created a demand for more well-educated priests and raised dissatisfaction with the clergy when the demand was unmet.

Another reason for anti-clerical feeling can be traced to an emerging prosperous middle class. The middle class, along with nobles, looked longingly at the rich land holdings of the Church in England at the outset of the Reformation. The Church exceeded the Crown in wealth of land holdings. Church taxes were pervasive and comprehensive, following the parishioner from the cradle to the grave. The strange and well-known case of London merchant Richard Hunne—found strangled in an ecclesiastical jail after refusing to surrender to the parish rector the burial shroud of his

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<sup>67</sup>Parker, 22; Pill, 21, 23. Both authors use a quotation by Andrea Trevisan, Venetian ambassador, about the spirituality of the English people, published as Italian Relation in 1497: "... they all attend Mass everyday, and say many Paternosters in public...they always hear Mass on Sunday in their parish church, and give liberal alms...nor do they omit any form incumbent on Good Christians...above all their riches are displayed in the church treasures; for there is not a parish church in the kingdom so mean as not to possess crucifixes, candlesticks, censers, patens and cups of silver...there are, however, many who have various opinions concerning religion."



infant son as a fee—scandalized Thomas More and the Bishop of London and set off a wave of anti-clerical feeling in the capital.<sup>68</sup>

Anti-clericalism was only one preparation for reform, but did not lead necessarily to it. The English also had a reputation for being spiritually sensitive. Churches were lovingly cared for and the English Church was generally wealthy. It was this spirituality that opened the door for Lollardy during the Papal Schism early in the fifteenth century. Lollards did not hold all the tenets later prescribed to by Protestants, although their existence supports the Protestant notion that ecclesiastical abuses were questioned in every generation that preceded the sixteenth-century reforms. According to John Foxe, Lollards were characterized by adherence to four principal emphases: denial of saint-worship, of pilgrimage, and of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular.<sup>69</sup>

Haigh maintains that those whom he refers to as practicing Whiggish history have exaggerated the importance of Lollards, who lost support among the intellectuals and gentry after their involvement in the Oldcastle Rebellion of 1414, and John Wycliffe's condemnation at Constance in 1415. Haigh cites the fact that there are few

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<sup>68</sup> Dickens, 51. John Foxe, The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, ed. George Townsend, vol. IV (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 183-205.

<sup>69</sup>Foxe, 218.

tracts extant after 1430 and argues that this bears the marks of an unpopular heresy.<sup>70</sup> But the low number of tracts may also be explained by general social upheaval. For example, Pill refers to anti-Lollard tracts written in the middle of the fifteenth century, and speculates that the War of the Roses may have distracted officialdom until the stasis of warring nobility settled. Relative internal peace saw the resumption of persecution of Lollards with magistrates conducting raids, trials, and executions in the first decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>71</sup> Thus, there is evidence of significant Lollard activity on the eve of the English Reformation. The Bishop of Lincoln, William Smith, extracted recantations from over eighty Lollards in 1506.<sup>72</sup>

These examples of an active Lollardy do not impress Haigh, who believes the outward activities of Lollards could mislead one to think they had greater influence than was actually the case. He surmises that the attraction to the independence of Lollardy could not outweigh the personal dangers it presented due to a general hostility toward heresy. According to Haigh, this antagonism resulted in a high probability that Lollards, if they were present, would be turned in to civil and ecclesiastical officials.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Haigh, 52-53. For more counter-arguments see Geoffrey Martin, "Wyclif, Lollards, and Historians," in Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England, eds. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003), 240-241.

<sup>71</sup> Pill, 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> Foxe, iv, 217-218. Cited in Dickens and Carr, 26-27.

<sup>73</sup> Haigh, 55.

Haigh is correct in saying that it is difficult to gauge the complete significance of the Lollards. He does hold that their influence on the English Reformation is greater than their actual numbers suggest. He denies, however that their continued existence and numbers in early Tudor England suggest a general dissatisfaction with the pre-Reformation church.<sup>74</sup> For Haigh to be correct about what he considers Whiggish overestimations of Lollardy he must assume that the religious movement would have had a wide and relatively even distribution of adherents in order to wield significant influence. Haigh, then, established his view that Lollardy was insignificant when he found little evidence of activity in the districts he studied, usually in the religiously conservative northern counties.<sup>75</sup>

There is no evidence of wide and even presence of Lollardy, but there is confirmation of concentrated pockets of Lollards. Lollard activity was strongest in the South, particularly in Buckinghamshire and Sussex, where anti-clerical feeling outweighed suspicion of neighbors' heterodox activities.<sup>76</sup> The Lollards' strongholds were also the first places where the Reformation began to take root. Contemporary officials' concerns about their numbers and influence could have been exaggerated, but

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 336. Haigh even admits to this possibility by stating that his own view of the English Reformation has been too-much influenced by his local studies of Lancashire, one of the counties most resistant to religious innovations.

<sup>76</sup> Dickens, 50-51.

their prominent existence and their agreement with Protestants on a number of biblical doctrines certainly seems to indicate that they provided another important context for the development of Protestantism in England.

However, in some ways the country was not prepared for a popular Reformation. There were fears, particularly in the northern counties, about what religious change might mean in the economic sphere. Henry VIII was popular among his subjects, for the most part, despite the challenge to his monarchy presented in the north of England by the reactionary Pilgrimage of Grace movement in 1536. Its leader, Robert Aske, a devout Catholic, wanted a return to papal supremacy, but he was executed in 1537. Nevertheless, the stronger appeal of the Pilgrimage was not return to Catholic doctrines but away from the perceived instability caused by the Reformation Parliament. One could hold Protestant doctrines and yet oppose the implications of the royal supremacy. A case in point is the fact that Protestant Sir Francis Bigod joined the Pilgrimage of Grace without abandoning his Protestant opinions.<sup>77</sup> The primary grievances behind this challenge to the royal supremacy were economic and devotional anxieties that grew out of a response to the dissolution of the monasteries, particularly in the north. Aske had maintained that the result of dissolving the monasteries would be the loss of circulation of coin and in the dismantling of infrastructure, both of which

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<sup>77</sup> Dickens and Carr, 22, 102-103.

were crucial to the economic health of Yorkshire and Lancashire.<sup>78</sup> Unlike Bigod, however, most early English Protestants were influenced by Luther's attitude toward monastic life and supported Cromwell's policies.<sup>79</sup> Luther had maintained that monasteries and nunneries should be abandoned not only because they bred excess and licentiousness, but also because secular occupations should be exalted as legitimate paths to spirituality. Further, monasteries were potential staging grounds for opposition to the royal supremacy, the watchwords of which were unity and concord.<sup>80</sup>

### **Humanism and the Coming of a New Hermeneutic**

One of the greatest preparations for Reformation that occurred for intellectuals was the stimulus of Christian humanism. From at least the mid-fifteenth century humanism had been exercising an increasing influence on education in England. Affected by new learning from the Continent and supplied with printed works, new schools emphasized the study of the classics of ancient Greece and Rome. Promising English students went to Italy to study and came back after the 1470s infused with the love of texts, which were studied with an historical and critical method. One of these

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>79</sup> Parker, 94-95, 112-113; Rex, 59-60.

<sup>80</sup> These spiritual and political grounds for favoring the dissolution of monasteries do not diminish the fact that the former monasteries became a lucrative source of income for the Crown.

was Thomas Linacre (1460-1524), who became physician to Henry VII and a driving force behind the establishment of the Royal College of Physicians. Linacre also gave lectures on Greek classical literature at Oxford University, and Linacre was a tutor to the child prodigy, Reginald Pole (1500-1558).<sup>81</sup> Another English intellectual who studied in Italy as a young man was John Colet, son of the Lord Mayor of London. The younger Colet wedded the literary criticism of the new learning with biblical exegesis. Colet delivered an important series of sermons on the Epistle to the Romans at St. Paul's in London, a portion of which will be examined in this study.

A consideration of John Colet's exposition of Romans is an important point of departure for understanding the contextual assumptions of sixteenth-century English interpreters of Romans 13. Colet was an English humanist, and the friend of influential humanists, who had the potential to exert great influence on the hermeneutics of English interpreters on the eve of the Reformation and after. At first glance, Colet appears to have thrown off the theological accretions of medieval interpreters who employed a traditional exegesis that had largely ignored the historical context of the apostolic author. Taking the historical context seriously along with maintained confidence in biblical authority had the potential to render traditional obedience models irrelevant. It certainly would have supported the later Protestant notion that prelates are subject to the civil magistrate, but unqualified could have led to the conclusion that

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<sup>81</sup> Foxe, IV, 248; Pill, 26, 30, 181.

Romans 13 is irrelevant to magistrates who claim to be Christians. The Christian magistrate may not have been oxymoronic to the original audience of Paul's letter, but it represented a rare, if not unknown, category. Finally, Colet was a known advocate of reform who was reported to have run afoul of the ecclesiastical establishment. His early call for reform could have drawn the interest of later Protestant interpreters who sought change in a later generation.

Colet's influence may have come to the exegetes of the English Reformation in a roundabout way. First, Colet was a friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), the most famous and influential of the humanists of the Northern Renaissance, and may have been the chief inspiration for Erasmus' production of the *Novum Instrumentum*.<sup>82</sup> This work was a critical Koine Greek New Testament edition and a fresh Latin translation based on the Greek text that differed in crucial respects with the official and, therefore, sacrosanct Latin Vulgate of St. Jerome. Second, Colet's approach to Romans 13:1-7 may have come to the attention of, and influenced, French-Swiss reformer John Calvin (1509-1564), who, proved to be a great influencer of the English Reformation. It was incumbent upon Medieval and Renaissance commentators to be aware of, and to correct if necessary, previous commentaries on a selected text.<sup>83</sup> Calvin's

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<sup>82</sup> Foxe, 246-248.

<sup>83</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 66. Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in

methodological concerns and approaches to Romans are similar to Colet's, which may suggest humanistic influence on the former. Calvin's identification of the historical situation that drives the understanding of the passage is remarkably like Colet's and guided by a similar desire for elegance and simplicity.<sup>84</sup> The historical approach to interpretation first demonstrated by Colet and echoed by Calvin not only lent itself to satisfying the need for documentation and objectivity, but also later supported the Protestant emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*. This gave stimulus to the twin disciplines of preaching and publishing, together comprising what A. G. Dickens termed the most powerful engine "to arouse ordinary people" to the action of advancing the Reformation.<sup>85</sup>

To study the Scriptures with a critical and historical approach, in the same manner as they did pagan classics, was a hallmark of Christian humanists like Colet and Erasmus. Reading the New Testament in the original languages apart from theological accretions also served the practical purpose of substantiating the humanists' observations of abuses within the Church, and buttressed their loathing of superstition and guided them to a more personal and devotional faith. Humanists were welcomed into the Tudor court both before and after the accession of Henry VIII and were

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Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation, eds. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>85</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 381.



patronized by the monarchs on occasion.<sup>86</sup> Erasmus' hope was that Henry VIII would prove to be a ruler who would embody the "philosophy of Christ," particularly that he would rule justly without resorting to violent and wasteful wars as so many of his predecessors and contemporaries had.<sup>87</sup> In the end, however, the influence of Erasmus and other humanists was perhaps greatest in the realm of biblical exegesis.

Many of the leaders of the English Reformation shared the views of humanist scholars about the abuses within the Roman Church and the need for an objective text of the New Testament in order to compare present realities of the Church with the apostolic model. They also shared the humanists' desire for a more personal and spiritual Christianity. Like the humanists, they thought private devotion had been sacrificed by medieval overemphasis on corporate models. What they discovered is that the visible church bore little resemblance to what they found in the Scriptures. They believed that the church had been drifting away from the apostolic model for over a millennium and that the only way to address the misguided theology and superstition that spiritually paralyzed Christendom was to reintroduce the ancient text of the New Testament. Like their brethren on the Continent, they believed that reform came about from allowing the Bible to be properly translated to determine the doctrines,

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<sup>86</sup> Foxe, 247.

<sup>87</sup> J. R. Hale, War and Society in Renaissance Europe 1450-1620 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 35; See Liam J. Atchison, "Friends Have All Things in Common: Erasmus' Utopian Dreams of a Better World," Mars Hill Review 19 (2002): 37-48.

organization, and ritual of the church—*Sola Scriptura*. The Vulgate was a flawed translation that supported the medieval accretions that dominated the soteriological understanding of the Roman Church. Tyndale’s fresh translation was consciously and inherently subversive because it came directly out of a study of the original Greek manuscripts that called into question both what the Roman Church emphasized and what it de-emphasized. The church had accentuated a hierarchical ecclesiastical structure that Tyndale’s translation of the Pauline epistles did not seem to support.<sup>88</sup> Roman soteriology did not highlight the act of justification,<sup>89</sup> so apparent to an English reader of Tyndale’s translation of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. In Tyndale’s version of Romans one may see solafidianism plainly set forth.<sup>90</sup>

One of the reasons the English Reformation was unprecedented was that two seemingly conflicting horizons intersected. The first horizon was Henry’s aim for unity

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<sup>88</sup> Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, 320. For example, Tyndale affixes a marginal note to Titus 1, explaining to the reader that “Bishops and elders is (sic) all one and an officer chosen to govern the congregation in doctrine and living.” This must have seemed at odds to people used to experiencing the pluralism and absenteeism of medieval bishops. The implication is also that the congregation is at least instrumental in the choosing of bishops and elders.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 223. According to Tyndale, “by justifying, understand none other thing than to be reconciled to God and to be restored unto his favour, and to have thy sins forgiven thee.”

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.* In Tyndale’s contribution to the Prologue to the Romans (most of the Prologue was a translation of Luther’s introduction to Romans) he writes, “The sum and whole cause of the writings of this epistle, is, to prove that a man is justified by faith only: which proposition whoso denieth, to him is not only this epistle and all that Paul writeth, but also the whole scripture so locked up, that he shall never understand it to his soul’s health.” If Tyndale (along with Luther) is correct that justification is by faith alone, the publishing of this doctrine in the vernacular may be construed as subversive to the Roman Church’s system of works.

and concord through obedience to the king, the supreme head of the English Church. He legislated reforms to the English Church by using more legal than biblical language. In contrast, the doctrinal reformers who initially supported Henry wanted his subjects to submit to scriptural exhortations concerning the Christian's relationship to the magistrate. They maintained that obedience to the king was the path of obedience to God because the New Testament taught it. If this obedience led to disunity and discord among Christians, then so be it. So Henry wanted obedience to the monarch for the purpose of creating and maintaining a unified society, while reformers wanted obedience to the Scriptures that may or may not lead to disunity—conformity to the biblical revelation was paramount. But obedience to the Scriptures would also mean that ecclesiastical authorities should submit to the civil authorities and that it was possible to cooperate with the magistrates to reform the Church. To Luther and Tyndale, the apparently conflicting horizons intersected in Romans 13 and other passages that dealt with the Christians' relationship to the prince. While the monarch was relatively benign and cooperative there was little reason to look beyond a surface reading of Romans 13 that called for unquestioning obedience to the king, but when the monarch became hostile to Protestant reform (as Mary I did upon her accession in 1553), or moved too slowly (as did Elizabeth I), or threatened hard-fought gains (as did James I and the other Stuarts) a more careful consideration of the passages became necessary.

## John Colet and Historical Interpretation in Pre-Reformation England

The methodology of historical interpretation that characterized humanist and Protestant exegesis may be most clearly seen in the work of Colet, who delivered a series of lectures in Latin on St. Paul's letter to the Romans at Oxford in 1497. As noted above, Colet may have influenced John Calvin's approach to Romans, but some have traditionally minimized the English humanist's contribution to the development of sixteenth-century exegesis particularly in his native England. Still others have even suggested that the lectures, as the work of a medieval interpreter, only present a fragment of Colet's work on Romans. For example, Colet's nineteenth-century biographer, J. H. Lupton, translated these lectures in 1873 and provided the Latin text following his English rendering. As if to emphasize the fact that Colet's lectures had been overlooked as an influence on Reformation hermeneutics, Lupton stated that the original manuscript of Colet's had "lain substantially untouched on the shelves of the Cambridge University Library with perhaps one exception since Colet had delivered them."<sup>91</sup> British historian Catherine Davies observed a hermeneutical approach in these

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<sup>91</sup> J. H. Lupton, "Preface" in John Colet, *An Exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. H. Lupton (Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press Incorporated, 1965), v. Originally published in London in 1873. Lupton does not say what the exception was. He could have been making reference to Samuel Knight, an early eighteenth-century biographer of Colet. Why was this manuscript preserved at

lectures that seemed more “modern” than that of both Colet’s contemporaries and sixteenth-century commentators. Some historians have thus assumed he was largely forgotten, and this issue must be addressed if one is to maintain that he influenced Protestant exegetes.<sup>92</sup>

Was Colet influential, and, if so to what extent? For purposes of analysis, Colet’s career was brief and quite orderly. After travel and study in Italy from 1492 to 1496, Colet returned to England, first living for a short time with his father before moving to Oxford where he wrote his lectures on the Pauline epistles, so highly regarded by his friend Erasmus. Shortly thereafter, in 1505, he accepted an appointment to become Dean of St. Paul’s where he undertook to reform the cathedral chapter.

Interestingly, the assessment of those chapter reforms divides roughly along the lines of how historians view the causes of the English Reformation. The predominant traditional view is that Colet’s reforms, especially those aimed at correcting clerical deviations, represent incipient Protestantism. However, if one follows the revisionist

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Cambridge University when the lectures were delivered at Oxford University? There may be many reasons, but most likely among the proposed explanations are either simply that the lectures were considered significant enough that both libraries initially preserved the manuscripts, or that early Protestants, who found more of a haven at Cambridge, may have preserved them as a proto-Protestant document. Whether Colet himself was a proto-Protestant is a matter of debate, with revisionists recently insisting on his Roman orthodoxy. See Haigh, 8-10.

<sup>92</sup> Catherine Davies, *A Religion of the Word: The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 2002), 158. Davies maintains that Colet’s understanding of the situation of the Roman Christians in St. Paul’s time was not shared by later interpreters in the Tudor era.

line that Protestantism only grew as a result of official coercion, one tends to treat Colet as an eccentric (at best) but an orthodox Catholic. From this perspective, Colet is to be seen insisting upon reform from the pulpit out of his obsessive-compulsive tendencies when, in fact, the clerics he complains about are just not all that bad.<sup>93</sup> If one accepts the revisionist line, Colet must be dismissed as a serious and significant humanist who influenced the agents of reform, and be impeached as a reliable witness of contemporary clerical abuses. If one follows the revisionist conclusions to their reasonable end, Colet cannot be trusted to paint an accurate picture of the state of his own cathedral, let alone the state of the English clergy.<sup>94</sup> In short, the revisionist approach is to make that which has been traditionally thought to be Colet's proto-Protestantism the eccentric overstatement of an essentially orthodox churchman.

Scholars who reject Colet as proto-Protestant spend a great deal of energy emphasizing the exaggerated nature of his attacks on abuses within the English Church, and even the monarchy. To these revisionists, what a previous generation of historians maintained was Colet's sympathy with ideas later enlarged and acted upon by Protestants was in reality the hyperbole of a zealous ideologue striving to drive home a point. For example, Colet occasionally overstated his concerns about the chapter of St.

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<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Arnold, "John Colet, Preaching and Reform at St. Paul's Cathedral, 1505-19," *Historical Research* 76, no. 194 (2003): 455; Christopher Haigh, "Anticlericalism and the English Reformation," *History* 68 (1983): 391-406. Haigh says that anti-clericalism as a serious influence for Reformation is an invention of (presumably Whiggish) historians.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 460. Arnold calls Colet a "misfit" as a secular cleric.

Paul's out of a theoretical, if not impulsive, urge to reform the ecclesiastical organization. Revisionists maintain that Colet preached against Henry's warmongering out of an esoteric dreaminess that arose from his love of Pseudo-Dionysius' spiritual theology.<sup>95</sup> In commenting on Colet's 1510 Canterbury Convocation<sup>96</sup> sermon, Haigh contends that Colet's remarks about the negative state of the church are directed to a small minority of the episcopate, represented at convocation by Bishop James Stanley (1450-1515) of Ely, step-brother of Henry VII. Stanley was the one bishop present who did not already embody or sympathize with the ideals presented by Colet in the sermon.<sup>97</sup> Colet's call for reform in the convocation sermon appeared to be just another in a long tradition of jeremiads complaining about the state of the clergy. To Haigh, Colet's sermon is part of a procession that includes a number of preachers of reform: Bernard of Clairvaux, Robert Grosseteste, William Langland, and Thomas Gascoigne.<sup>98</sup> In the revisionist understanding Erasmus, rather than being profoundly affected by the Englishman, is presented as amused and patronizing of an arrogant and overbearing Colet.<sup>99</sup> The bishop of London is presented as a jealous rival who brings heresy charges

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>96</sup> Recent evidence has revised the year of this convocation from 1511 to 1510. See J. B. Gleason, John Colet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 181-184.

<sup>97</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*, 9-10.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>99</sup> Arnold, 456.

against the dean completely without substance, and manifesting generosity of spirit, Henry VIII gently takes Colet aside to correct his manners.<sup>100</sup> The case that Colet was accused of heresy is made on the strength of Colet's convocation sermon, another homily that was his one extant sermon interpreted in light of his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>101</sup> and on the strength of his friendships with three champions of ecclesiastical reform, Thomas More, John Fisher, and Cuthbert Tunstall, all of whom combined reformist attitudes with unassailable orthodoxy.<sup>102</sup>

A. G. Dickens answers the revisionist challenge by marshalling evidence to defend the more traditional view of Colet. For example, he points out that there were a number of other complementary indications that the clergy of the English Church were

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Colet perhaps mistakenly put his faith in the power of the pulpit rather than the printed page to advance his reforms. The convocation sermon, like the commentaries on 1 Corinthians and Romans, was not printed in Colet's lifetime. See J. B. Trapp, "John Colet, His Manuscripts and the Ps.-Dionysius," in *Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 1500-1700* ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 206. Arnold says that Colet's moralizing must be understood in light of his melding of Pauline ecclesiology with the spiritual idealism of Pseudo-Dionysius, whom Arnold says Colet would have understood to be the first century convert of the Apostle Paul mentioned in Acts 17. See Arnold, 457; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking, 2003), 33. Caution needs to be exercised here, however. It is not certain that Colet was unaware of Erasmus' view that Dionysius was not the Areopagite mentioned in St. Luke's narrative of St. Paul in Athens. Neither can one be certain how it affected Colet's ecclesiology, though it does support the notion that earthly institutions (in this case the church) reflect the heavenly regiment, thus supporting the divine origin of the earthly institution. Based on extant documents if Colet urged moral reformation one can be sure that he was profoundly influenced by St. Paul. See Trapp, 218-221.

<sup>102</sup> The possible exception is Tunstall, who readily disposed of papal supremacy. He could not match More in effective heresy hunting either. Tunstall perhaps blundered in promoting the infiltration of Tyndale's New Testament by using an intermediary to buy up copies of the first printing without obtaining the plates. Thus, Catholic martyrs More and Fisher were canonized, while Tunstall upheld the king's supremacy. See Haigh, *English Reformations*, 13-14; Dickens and Carr, 36-37.



in serious trouble on the eve of the Reformation. Satirists, popular sermons, and poetry expand the documentary evidence Dickens offers.<sup>103</sup> In connection with Colet, Dickens addresses the charge that the Convocation sermon has been too hastily employed in attempts to make Colet a proto-Protestant.<sup>104</sup> Dickens agrees that Colet was an orthodox churchman,<sup>105</sup> but points out that the Convocation was called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham (1450-1532), to come up with reforms to turn the tide of the “hostile attitude of the laity toward the clergy and the rights of the church.”<sup>106</sup> Colet preached the sermon that opened the proceedings and was later placed on the archbishop’s committee that concretely proposed three reforms.<sup>107</sup> Though Colet was preaching to the choir by exhorting reform-minded bishops, could it not be possible that Colet was reflecting the perceptions and policies of both Warham and the majority of bishops assembled? This would seem to constitute more than one eccentric dean’s assessment of the state of the clergy.

Colet’s influence on reform, regardless of his awareness of that influence or where it might lead is equally intact. He not only encouraged Erasmus in the

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<sup>103</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 319.

<sup>104</sup> Haigh, 9.

<sup>105</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, 28.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

preparation of the influential critical Latin translation of the Greek New Testament, but also helped him in the initial preparation of the epistolary literature.<sup>108</sup> Colet's reformist agenda, contained in his sermons at St. Paul's, must have had broader appeal than just to the clergy that needed reform. Foxe reports that Lollards from Buckinghamshire attended Colet's preaching at St. Paul's and came away with a favorable impression.<sup>109</sup> Neither was he the lone voice for reform. Besides Warham, William Melton, tutor to the saintly Bishop of Rochester John Fisher, drew attention to widespread clerical ignorance and abuse.<sup>110</sup>

Colet's views on reform could be held to be either neurotic or creative overstatement if there were not so much evidence that the ecclesiastical abuses he describes are also depicted by contemporaries. Revisionists have rightly drawn attention to these so-called overstatements because they are the crux of the issue that centers around whether or not the English people perceived the English Church to be in need of reform on the eve of the Reformation. Colet, as one witness among many, supports the traditional view that holds reported ecclesiastical abuses were not mere exaggerations.

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<sup>108</sup> Trapp, 208.

<sup>109</sup> Foxe, IV:246; Dickens, English Reformation, 50-51.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Rex, The Theology of John Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23-25; Dickens, English Reformation, 69.

What about the influence of Colet's exegesis, particularly that which is contained in his lectures on Romans? Colet's influence should not be judged as to whether his specific views on Romans were adopted by a succession of commentators, but rather whether his methodology opened the door to literal and historical interpretive methods, which would eventually be adopted by Lutheran and Calvinist interpreters. Colet's humanist circle included Thomas More and Erasmus, both of whom insisted that theology must be based on an understanding of the Scriptures in the original Hebrew and Greek. In spite of Colet's association with Erasmus, widely regarded the most influential of the northern humanists, the Englishman rejected his view that the Scriptures contained multiple senses of meaning.<sup>111</sup> Erasmus was an advocate of historical interpretation, but maintained more medieval features, such as multiple interpretive levels, than did Colet. Colet espouses an incipient rationalistic approach to the Scriptures in which he insists on the identification of the divinely-inspired meaning with that of the original author. The single sense that is equated with the author's intent is discernible not only by a familiarity with grammar and the original languages but also by an understanding of the historical setting.

The traditional view of the proto-Protestant Colet's lectures on Romans is that they created a stir when they were delivered, due to their preoccupation with an

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Grant and David Tracy, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 102.

historical and plain interpretation of the biblical text. Harvard professor Richard Marius said that Colet's lectures remind one of later Puritan expositional preaching.<sup>112</sup> Marius reflects a prominent discontinuity view that sees humanist and later Reformation interpreters as sharply breaking with the traditional four-fold method of medieval interpretation. More than innovators and proto-Protestants, Colet and Erasmus, particularly the former, were held to have anticipated the critical approaches to the New Testament that emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>113</sup> Yale Reformation scholar Roland Bainton held that Erasmus never completely abandoned the medieval approach except that the Dutch humanist thought that the Scriptures were so rich that they had many more than four levels of meaning. The novelty of humanistic interpretation was not the exclusivity of the literal approach to exegesis of biblical texts, but the increased attention given to literal interpretation as a necessary basis and corrective to be employed before moving on to tropological, analogical, and allegorical meanings.<sup>114</sup> Colet could be taking this same foundational approach, but no examples of senses other than a literal one are extant in his studies of Romans.

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<sup>112</sup> Richard Marius, Thomas More: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1984), 71-72.

<sup>113</sup> For an exposition of this view see Daniel Fuller, "Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith," in R. A. Guelich, ed., Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 195.

<sup>114</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 141-142.

Duke history professor David Steinmetz has detected what he believes are anachronistic tendencies in the scholarly analyses of pre-Reformation and Reformation interpreters since the heyday of higher criticism in the late nineteenth century. The accepted higher critical approach against which Steinmetz speaks holds that humanists like Colet and Erasmus, and the Reformation exegetes who followed them stand out in sharp relief to the earlier practitioners of medieval interpretation. In short, the critical view as shared by historians of interpretation has been that the hermeneutics of the Reformation represented a radical break with what came before, and in their view a huge leap forward toward modernity, and thus anticipative of higher critical methods. However, according to Steinmetz it would have been improbable that medieval exegetical methodology could have been abandoned so completely in such a short period of time. In addition, sixteenth-century biblical interpreters held different presuppositions than critical and post-critical scholars concerning the object of the interpretive process and the locus of the exegete.<sup>115</sup> The object of the process was not strictly discovery of authorial intent as located within the community that gave rise to the text, but a living and meaningful reading for the life of the church. Thus Steinmetz argues that, despite oft-cited statements by the major reformers Luther and Calvin, the historical situation was not nearly as significant for humanist and Reformation

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<sup>115</sup> Here the term *locus* refers to the sphere of activity of the interpreter.

interpreters as canonical unity.<sup>116</sup> A prima facie reading of Colet's exposition of Romans may seem to argue against this view, but the argument in Steinmetz's favor maintains that Colet was not excluding the other three levels of medieval interpretation, but establishing an academic basis in the literal and historical methods. He was not attempting to be novel, but was constructing a basis for preaching by working from a connected subject and following it to a coherent conclusion.<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps more important for purposes of the present study is Steinmetz's notion of the locus of the sixteenth-century interpreter. Later critical scholarship emphasized the individuality of the sixteenth-century exegete, working in isolation to surgically remove the accretions to the text. But Steinmetz counters that humanist and Reformation interpreters, like their medieval predecessors, did not prize the earliest reading but read texts as part of the canonical whole in conversation with commentators of the past, who informed them, and contemporary exegetes, who debated them. Though sixteenth-century commentators did not always cite the predecessors they rely upon, they nevertheless drew upon their familiarity with a common fund of commentaries, particularly when dealing with a crucial text such as the Letter to the Romans.

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<sup>116</sup> To establish this assertion Steinmetz must overcome pointed statements by Luther and Calvin that diminish the traditional medieval approach. See Fuller, 196-200.

<sup>117</sup> David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980-1981): 27-38; Jonathan Arnold, "John Colet, Preaching and Reform at St. Paul's Cathedral, 1505-1519," *Historical Research* 76 no. 124 (November 2003): 451-453.

With regard to Romans 13, Steinmetz emphasizes the common-fund notion by comparing the approach of Luther's associate Philip Melanchthon to the passage with that of French reformer John Calvin. He contends that Calvin and Melanchthon agree in some points of interpretation and disagree in others despite drawing upon a number of the same commentaries. In comparing these two reformers, Steinmetz identifies six common questions that would have concerned sixteenth-century interpreters of Romans 13:1-7. These questions address the issues of identity of higher powers, extent of the command to submission, limitation of the command, basis of the command to submit, significance of the passage for an early modern situation, and how a theology of the Christian's relationship to the state emerges from the harmonization of various biblical texts that reference that relationship—the hermeneutical *analogia fidei*. Considered separately, these questions provide a useful way of evaluating interpretive approaches to this passage.<sup>118</sup> I propose to use these six questions in the study as a template to analyze various interpretations of Romans 13 in the English Reformation. Following are the questions:

1. Identity: Who do the interpreters identify as the higher powers to whom Christians are to be subject?
2. Extent: Does the interpreter believe it to be legitimate to include ecclesiastical authorities in the command to submit to authorities?

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<sup>118</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 200-201.

3. Limitations: What caveats does the interpreter place upon the command to submit to higher authorities, and by what hermeneutical principles does the interpreter arrive at those qualifiers?

4. Source of the Appeal: What basis does the interpreter believe the Apostle has appealed to in establishing the ordinance of the Christian's obedience to human authority—divine ordination, nature, reason, or some other source?

5. Portability: Does it still make sense to apply the passage to magistrates professing to be Christians, and secondarily, can Christians really be magistrates themselves without violating their consciences?

6. Analogies: What other biblical passages does the interpreter use, if any, to qualify the plain sense of the Romans 13 passage? Does the compulsion to obey God inevitably place Christians at loggerheads with the state?<sup>119</sup>

As useful as these six questions are for a consistent analysis of the various views that interpreters offered both on the eve of and in the midst of Reformation, a seventh must be advanced: what is the interpreter's exigence? That is, what events are occurring in the interpreter's environment, or what are her or his presuppositions, that make the decision to explain the passage important or affect either the level of interpretation selected for exposition? It is assumed that one reason Romans 13 is explicated in a series of lectures on Romans, such as undertaken by Colet, is for the sake

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 201.



of completeness: Colet prepared an exposition of Romans that addressed every passage in the book. Colet's treatment of every passage in Romans is affected by other, more personal considerations.

In beginning with Colet's exigence, it should be noted that his exposition of Romans includes few of the anachronistic elements that would enable a reader to construe what was happening in Colet's world, and how he would apply St. Paul's teaching to specific issues in that fifteenth-century cosmos. In this way, Colet champions an objective historical approach to the text. For example, in his exposition of Romans 13 he makes no reference to fifteenth-century rulers by name. He does mention rulers from the ancient past that he believed figured prominently in the events about which St. Paul was writing. The Roman emperor Claudius looms largely, as does the first-century observer Suetonius.<sup>120</sup>

Colet was consciously paving the way for reform of abuses in church and state, though not for Luther and his ilk. He described St. Paul in his letter to the Romans as dealing with three primary disputes that offered separate reasons for writing the letter: (1) differences between Jews and Gentiles within the infant church of Rome, (2) tension

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<sup>120</sup> John Colet, *An Exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. H. Lupton (Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press Incorporated, 1965), 94-95. The historical approach has a medieval antecedent in Hugh of St. Victor, who went further than even Colet was willing to in espousing a reading of Old Testament passages that attempted to locate its meaning in historical events. Hugh, however, was more pragmatic in his approach than the humanists in that if he determined a literal sense was useless the interpreter should pass on to allegory. See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 88-89.

between Christians and the “heathen” that not only surround them in the city of Rome, but who dominate the secular powers that obligate everyone to pay often unreasonable taxes, and (3) quarrels involving weaker and stronger Christians. Colet argued that it is the disputes between Christians and pagans that provide the cultural backdrop for understanding Romans 13. The command to be subject to the higher powers is a continuation of the apostle’s line of reasoning that he began in verse seventeen of the previous chapter: never pay back with evil deeds for an evil done.<sup>121</sup> Colet’s method in approaching the Scriptures was an historical and a literal one in which the one meaning of the passage is the sense that appears on the surface.<sup>122</sup> The interpreter is to practice distanciation, the pursuit of objectivity in reading the passage in such a way that one can connect the surface reading to the events taking place in the lives of the original audience. Practicing distanciation made it necessary to make subordinate the historical and cultural considerations of the secondary readers, or interpreters, and address them in another context.<sup>123</sup>

Colet’s historical reading of the apparent situation yields a picture of a fledgling church at Rome, surrounded by pagans and their unreasonable rulers. Thus the call to

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<sup>121</sup> Colet, 96, 202. “Nulli malum pro malo reddentes providentes bona non tantum Deo in vobismet ipsis sed coram hominibus, illis forinsecus paganis quibuscum vivitis.”

<sup>122</sup> Grant and Tracy, 102.

<sup>123</sup> Presumably Colet addressed fifteenth-century concerns in determining the significance of the text to address contemporary concerns through the vehicle of preaching.

obey the higher authorities is given to Christians under non-Christian or, more accurately, *anti-Christian* rule. The apostle's call to obedience does not carry universal implications, but is a matter of expedient survival for the Roman Christians at the time the letter was penned. Colet makes it clear that St. Paul does not have in mind any issues where faith may be compromised. In those cases where their faith is violated they are not obligated to obey. Thus, Colet sees the apostle as teaching the possibility of at least passive resistance to authority.

In the historical context, Colet holds that St. Paul is concerned with money matters or "whatever else the world is covetous of."<sup>124</sup> The apostle fears that Christians will be pushed too far by the Emperor Claudius<sup>125</sup> in the exaction of taxes, so he provides a blanket prohibition to those who might refuse to pay. Such refusal had the potential of bringing down the disapprobation of their neighbors and the wrath of the emperor. Colet connects St. Paul's exigence with Suetonius' cryptic report of Jewish agitation on account of the one who is called "Chrestus." Colet believed that this unrest contained all the pieces to the puzzle of why St. Paul insisted that vengeance is not an option for Christians. The Roman faithful were to expect reprisals from their pagan

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<sup>124</sup> Colet, 91.

<sup>125</sup> Claudius I (Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus), Roman emperor, A. D. 41-54. Among other skills, Claudius was considered a first-rate historian and the leading authority on Etruscan civilization in Rome. See Allen M. Ward, Fritz M. Heichelheim, and Cedric A. Yeo, A History of the Roman People, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 307-308.

neighbors.<sup>126</sup> The Roman authorities may or may not intervene, though they carry out God's righteous purposes whenever they punish evildoers and protect those who do good. In the sense that they oppose evil and exalt good, they are God's servants, but Colet says that there is no mistake that these Roman rulers are otherwise themselves evil.<sup>127</sup>

Colet pointed out that Claudius was entirely unpredictable in that he sometimes was a paragon of wise rule, and at other times ruled in an impulsive and unjust manner. Colet further says that God allows this sort of erratic magistrate for a time as the exhibition of the power of unbelieving, but no one really knows why he does. To him, the only recourse the Christians have to such awful government is contained in the imposition of the opposite virtue.<sup>128</sup> When Christians are treated with evil they are to

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<sup>126</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquilius (A. D. 69-135) was Imperial Librarian under the Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138), textual critic, and biographer. His major surviving biographical work is entitled Lives of Twelve Caesars and provides gossipy tales of twelve emperors beginning with Julius Caesar and ending with Domitian. Colet may be taking this source more seriously than he ought when he places so much stock in Suetonius' report that Claudius was levying outrageous taxes and letting no one escape without some tax being imposed on them. Suetonius' picture seems at odds with the reputation Claudius had for being an emperor who relieved tax burdens. See Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, 309, 353-354; Colet, 95.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 95-96. In his biography of Claudius (25:4), Suetonius writes that Claudius "expelled Jews from Rome because of their constant disturbances impelled by Chrestus." Cited in Raymond E. Brown, Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 562. St. Luke records a similar statement in Acts 18:2: where St. Paul's initial meeting with fellow-tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth after their expulsion from Italy "as a result of Claudius Caesar's order to deport all Jews from Rome." Since it is now generally agreed that this meeting was in A. D. 50 after the expulsion order the previous year, and that St. Paul did not pen Romans until 57/58 (56 in the revisionist chronology, which tends to propose earlier dates for New Testament writings), Colet was almost certainly mistaken in his identification of the situation which the apostle addressed, though St. Paul could have been urging caution in the days before Nero scapegoated followers of Christ. See Brown, 559-572.

<sup>128</sup> Colet, 95-97.

respond with goodness. Colet believes this is the reason context is so important: he is entreating Christians to offer obedience to rulers who inspire the opposite response. The magistrates St. Paul has in mind are actually the enemies of the Christians. The identity of the higher powers in Colet's understanding of Romans 13 is that of adversarial non-Christians who are temporarily allowed by God to be stewards of the divine imperative to punish evil and defend good. It is noteworthy that these magistrates are apparently opposed to Christianity either on the basis of its novelty or its association with Judaism. Pagan magistrates must be overcome by obedience and doing good, returning the evil of adversarial powers with blessing.<sup>129</sup>

According to Colet, the apostle urges the Roman Christians to capitalize on the civil authorities' lack of understanding by cheerfully accepting their ordinances, regardless of how unreasonable the regulations might be. The believers can ally themselves with the two-fold aim of the heathen magistrate to punish the evil and protect the good but, perhaps more importantly, by responding promptly and positively to what is demanded of them they are not inviting the unpredictable attentions of the authorities. In Colet's view, St. Paul is buying time for Roman Christians to await God's disposition of heathen rulers. There is no long-term consideration here, and that should cause Colet's contemporaries to not accept St. Paul's exhortation as absolute. Roman Christians had to survive the magistrate's moment in

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<sup>129</sup> Colet, 92.

the sun by believing that God would remove the enemy currently in power. No one knows why God chose this particular servant of his will and it is God who will remove the despot in time. If one were to draw a contemporary application of Colet's interpretation of Romans 13, it would have been either been that the passage is not directly applicable in Christendom with its magistrates who profess a Christian faith, or that patience is urged in the case of bad government with the imposition of opposite virtues.

## **Conclusion**

Early in the sixteenth century, the English were known as a deeply religious people, and this spirituality combined with a basic dissatisfaction that grew out of anti-clerical feeling prepared them for the coming of reform. Anti-clericalism was fueled by political events to be sure, such as the king's pursuit of supremacy over the primates of the English Church. Still, there is evidence that the Bible in the vernacular stimulated an excitement for reform that cannot be merely explained by the imposition of the king's will. Far from being dead as a movement, Lollardy presented the possibility of an independent and individual Christianity based upon the Scriptures translated into the language of the people. The bibliocentric faith as modeled by the Lollards must

have appealed to an increasingly literate public that was dissatisfied with the perceived incompetence and worldliness of the prelacy. Luther's doctrines appealed to the spiritually disaffected who longed for reform, and Luther also brought a belief that the magistrate, owed obedience by his subjects, could help implement reform in the church.

Humanism's influence also stimulated desire for reform in the English Church and interest in the Bible. New schools on the Continent and the presence of humanists in England attracted students who were drawn to studies of the Greek language and classical literature. These interests created a natural connection to, and interest in the study of the Bible in its original languages. To engage in these studies students learned critical methods that allowed interpreters to examine the Scriptures with methods similar to those applied to other forms of classical literature. As humanists translated and pursued, as did Erasmus, the philosophy of Christ, it was only natural that their critical methodology would lead them to compare the current state of churches with the New Testament ideal.

No English interpreter had ever demonstrated such a concern for a purely understood historical context in biblical interpretation as John Colet had. Whether Colet's lectures on Romans were lost to memory, or exerted an influence on Reformation era exegesis is a question for debate. John Foxe is probably most responsible for the long-standing view that Colet was a proto-Protestant, and that analysis centered on his reformist preaching and the legendary lectures on Romans.

Concerned with reform, but unable to anticipate the events that would unfold later in the sixteenth century, Colet was a Catholic whose greatest theological eccentricity was his enthusiastic assessment of the neo-Platonism of the Florentine humanists. His exegesis of the Scriptures had a sense of timelessness that made it difficult to assess what the significance of his interpretation had for those around him and for himself. It is as if the lectures on Romans were to Colet what a drawn study would be to the painter of a portrait. Colet apparently did not produce a complete portrait of Romans, but the “study” showed his genius nonetheless. Colet was probably attempting to lay a foundation for preaching about reform. The imposition of opposite virtues was a spiritual weapon that could prove effective in a variety of contexts, though it was not picked up by most English Reformation interpreters. Aside from the testimony of John Foxe there is little documentary evidence of the influence of Colet on the interpreters of the English Reformation. His lectures on Romans are an extraordinary example of a thorough application of an historical interpretive method. Because of little evidence of his larger influence on later commentators it is difficult to know whether his lectures on Romans were a complete picture of his interpretive method or only part of a larger and traditional medieval approach to the biblical text, as suggested by some revisionists. There is some limited evidence that Colet’s true contribution was an interpretive spirit that was directly or indirectly infused into interpreters who followed him. The first



group of followers that will be considered are those who, like this Christian humanist, were more comfortable with non-resistance.

# CHAPTER 2 - The Non-Resistance of Henrician and Edwardian Exegetes

## Introduction

Henry VIII is supposed to have said of William Tyndale's second most famous work, The Obedience of a Christian Man, "Thys ys a booke for me and all kyngs to reade!"<sup>130</sup> That Tyndale's more famous translations of the New Testament and portions of the Old profoundly affected the English language is beyond question. What is perhaps underestimated is the political influence of his writings. One scholar has suggested that even if he had not produced his English Bible, Tyndale would still be considered prominent because of his 1528 work, Obedience.<sup>131</sup> Tyndale, also known as William Hychyns, grew up in western Gloucestershire near the Welsh border and later attended Magdalen Hall, now Hertford College, Oxford from which he received a Bachelor of Arts in 1512 and the Master of Arts in 1515.<sup>132</sup> This passionate linguist and translator, the man who made a permanent place for words of Anglo-Saxon derivation

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<sup>130</sup> John Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, vol. 1, (London: n.p., 1822), 171-172; See G. W. Bernard, "Anne Boleyn's Religion," The Historical Journal 36 (1993): 1-20.

<sup>131</sup> David Daniell, William Tyndale: A Biography (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 223.

<sup>132</sup> Brian Moynahan, God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 3-11.

like *gospel* and *worship* in modern English, seems an unlikely advocate of unquestioning obedience to, or more accurately passive cooperation with, the king given that he himself was an outlaw and an exile from his native England.<sup>133</sup>

Tyndale's crime was his conviction that the English people ought to be able to read the Bible in their own language. His understanding of Christian obedience to civil authority came especially from the New Testament, perhaps through the influence of Martin Luther, and his central passage for development of the doctrine of the Christian's relationship to the state was Romans 13, which he explicated in his Obedience. Tyndale's exegesis of Romans 13 is a classic and influential statement in English of Luther's view of passive cooperation with the civil authorities as incumbent upon the Christian. If anyone had reason to propose active resistance to the magistrate it would have been William Tyndale, who opposed the ruler's keeping the Word of God out of the hands of his subjects. Though he fled his native country to pursue his work, he remained at heart a Bible man, and his emphasis on the plain understanding of the text, and the influence of Luther kept him firmly in the camp of those who saw St. Paul as teaching non-resistance to the higher powers in Romans 13.

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<sup>133</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Reformation: A History (New York: Viking, 2004), 197.

## Tyndale's Exposition of Romans 13

Tyndale began his exposition of Romans 13 with a way of understanding the context that differed from Colet. To Colet the Christian must display opposite virtues to an enemy such as a pagan magistrate in order to overcome his hatred by love, but Tyndale maintained that Christians under a wicked ruler must reflect upon their sins and repent of them. Colet had used Romans 12:21 as an anchoring verse, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." As shown previously, Colet saw the persecutor of 12:14 as one of the Roman rulers themselves. Though Tyndale championed a literal method of interpretation, he did not appeal to the historical aspect of it in his exposition of Romans 13 in Obedience. Instead of turning to the cultural elements encountered by early Roman Christians as exegetical support,<sup>134</sup> he employed

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<sup>134</sup> As Tyndale demonstrated in his written debates with Sir Thomas More, he realized that this was not the entire hermeneutical position. Tyndale also believed that no text can establish its own validity, without the text being validated beforehand. For More and other medieval Catholics this validation came from the testimony of tradition, both of decrees and councils. For Tyndale the text was validated by what he called "feeling faith" rather than what he termed More's "historical faith." He used the analogy of a child burning his finger to illustrate the point of departure between Catholics and Lutherans: "Then, even likewise, if my mother had blown on her finger, and told me that the fire would burn me, I should have believed her with an historical faith, but as soon as I had put my finger in the fire, I should have believed, not by the reason of her, but with a feeling faith, so that she could not have persuaded me afterward to the contrary." See William Tyndale, An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, The Supper of the Lord After the True Meaning of John VI. and 1 Cor. XI. And Wm. Tracy's Testament expounded. Edited for the Parker society, by the Rev. Henry Walter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1850), 51. For Tyndale, Christians are not merely those who have accepted truth on the authority of another, but have experienced the truth of the Scriptures through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Tyndale believed that Christians have God's law written on their hearts and that represents a feeling faith that causes the believer to accept the Scriptures as true through an internal witness.

biblical illustrations as a demonstration of his belief in the efficacy of Scripture being its own best interpreter.

It is perhaps because he showed less concern for the historical precedents indicating the original audience that Tyndale did not detect Colet's sense of the hostility of the magistrate in this text. The only significant suggestion of the allegiance of the ruler Tyndale alluded to is in verse six where he translated the anarthrous Greek noun *leitourgoi* as "ministers" of God:

Do wele then: and so shalt thou be prayesd off the same. For he is the minister of god for thy welth. Butt and yff thou do evyll, then feare. For he beareth not a swearde for nought, for he is the minister of god, to take vengeaunce on them that do evyll.<sup>135</sup>

For Tyndale, the persecutor mentioned in Romans 12 is not a magistrate, but some other enemy of the faith, and the magistrate mentioned in chapter 13 is not the Christian's enemy, but the servant of God.

To Tyndale, the chief characteristic of the ruler in Paul's letter is that the magistrate is a divinely-ordained higher power to whom God gave the authority to apply retributive justice. In his translation of Romans he suggests 12:9 through 13:10 as the pericope that supplies context. He translates the passage seeing the scilicetic<sup>136</sup> verb *estō* in 12:9 as governing a string of circumstantial participles with the force of

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<sup>135</sup> William Tyndale, trans. The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale: The Text of the Worms Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling, ed. W. R. Cooper (London: British Library, 2000), 342. Hereafter cited as WTNT.

<sup>136</sup> That is, a word not present but understood.

imperatives: "Let love be without dissimulation."<sup>137</sup> The last of these imperatives precedes a quotation in the same verse from the Torah, Deuteronomy 32:35, which reserves revenge-taking for God alone.<sup>138</sup> The verse he believed to govern the context of Romans 13 was found in 12:19, which preceded the verse Colet suggested as the heading. Tyndale rendered the passage in English as, "Dearly beloved avenge nott youreselves, butt geve roume unto the wrath of god."<sup>139</sup> To thus oppose the ruler is contrary to the divine command and the way God has ordered nature. God prearranged the degrees, or stature, of every creature in creation. It is not just the relation of the ruled to the ruler that is ordered, but children to parents, servant to master, and even lower sets of animals to higher. To resist such a divinely-established order is folly and will result ultimately in the loss of temporal life for one who refuses to comply with it. The apostle was concerned in this case with private revenge among Christians, and Tyndale sees the Romans 13:1-7 passage as a prohibition from Christians taking the laws into their own hands. There is a good reason for this prohibition in that each individual cannot be neutral in connection with his or her own grievances and is prone to make matters worse for all concerned.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> WTNT, 342 This is the first time English readers read "love" in this verse, rather than "charity."

<sup>138</sup> WTNT, 342.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Tyndale, Obedience, 37.

That rulers are ministers or those who render service<sup>141</sup> means that God has given laws and magistrates as arbiters in disputes in every nation and has given them the extraordinary status of vice-regents—those who rule as God’s representatives. Tyndale connects this passage with Exodus 22:9 by saying that in the Old Testament passage bringing a case before the judges was tantamount to bringing it before God himself (as these judges are called “gods” in that passage) and if one resists these vice-regents he resists God himself.<sup>142</sup> However, if one does not resist this arrangement he or she will have temporal life with the possibility of actually prospering, while those who resist will by no means escape God’s curse. Tyndale teaches that the one wronged must adopt a passive attitude when tempted to take the law into one’s own hands, which would be a clear instance of resisting the divine order. The ruler is the properly appointed avenger, but the real avenger is God himself: “For it is written: vengeance is myne, and I will rewarde saith the lorde.”<sup>143</sup>

Tyndale then follows Luther in insisting that there are no caveats that allow revenge in special circumstances. He is consistent with the greater theme of Obedience, which asserts that increased knowledge of biblical narratives in the vernacular is what

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<sup>141</sup> The Greek word often connotes divine as well as civil service. See Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament, vol. II. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 489.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 38; WTNT, 342.

will ultimately prevent usurpation of properly constituted authority. The case he cites in support of no exceptions to passivity is one that could be agreed upon as potentially justifying resistance, and is once again purposely drawn from the Scriptures. Tyndale introduces an Old Testament illustration from 1 Samuel 24 in which David refuses to avenge himself on his superior, God's anointed, then-king Saul.<sup>144</sup> Tyndale argues that since David himself was anointed to replace Saul as king then it would certainly be understandable for him to take his own revenge. Nevertheless, David refused to take revenge upon Saul. Neither would David permit any of his band of followers to exact reprisals on his behalf because God had made Saul king, and there is no judge for a king but God himself. With Saul dead and David ensconced on the throne, the latter employed the sword by executing those who claimed to have hastened Saul's demise on David's behalf. Death is an appropriate punishment for those who take the killing of a king into their own hands.<sup>145</sup> But one might rightly point out that Saul, though often inept and wicked in his way, according to the Scriptures, was clearly anointed by God. Tyndale says that it is also wrong to resist heathen princes that are no less God's appointments than righteous kings. Thus he reinforces the universal nature of the command to highlight the scriptural—and thus the true Lutheran—position that rebellion is unacceptable among Christians. Because private vengeance is rebellion

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<sup>144</sup> See Daniell's note on this in Tyndale, Obedience 211.

<sup>145</sup> Tyndale, Obedience, 38-40.



against God's order of degrees, the command against it allows no exceptions and is inalterably established. He contends that the continental reformers clearly teach that all magistrates are to be obeyed. And, Tyndale adds, if there is anyone who thinks that the magistrate may be resisted it is certainly not the reformers, but rather the prelates of the Roman church, who must be held responsible for abdicating their responsibility to teach the Scriptures.<sup>146</sup>

Tyndale's sarcasm concerning the defective teaching of the clergy brings the reader close to the exigence of The Obedience of a Christian Man. David Daniell, a biographer of Tyndale, professor at the University of London, and Chairman of the Tyndale Society asserts that Tyndale wrote Obedience in response to the charges of enemies of reform, particularly the English ones. These critics, such as Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher of Rochester, argued that it was Lutheran reform that was to blame for the growing anti-clerical feeling and violence in Europe.<sup>147</sup> More particularly laid the Peasant's Rebellion (1524-1525) at the feet of Luther and his followers. Tyndale was thus associated with those reformers who had been stirring up sedition and rebellion so More alternated his attacks between the German reformer and Luther's English minion Tyndale as if they were interchangeable. The revolt of the peasants in Germany was not the only indicator of the pernicious tenets of Luther and his ilk, so

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>147</sup> Daniell, 223-224.

was the sack of Rome in 1527 by the armies of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. More chalked all of the violence in Germany, Lombardy, and Rome up to the Lutheran's "myscheuous delynge that ye may perceyue by theyre dedys what good cometh of theyre secte. For as our sauour saythe ye shall knowe the tree by the fruit."<sup>148</sup>

More attributed this violence to a significant doctrine of Luther's, over which the German wrangled with More's friend Erasmus. More was perhaps obsessed with the implications of Luther's—and therefore Tyndale's—doctrine of predestination:

And therefore all lawes they sette at nought. And they holde that no man is bounden to obaye any but wolde be at lybertye to byleue what they lyste and doo what they lyste as they saye that god dothe with vs not what we deserue but what hym selfe lyste.<sup>149</sup>

That Tyndale followed Luther in his view of post-lapsarian bondage of the human will (here misstated by More) is demonstrated especially in "The Prologue to the Romans."<sup>150</sup> Harvard's Richard Marius, a prominent biographer of More, suggests that

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<sup>148</sup> St. Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, vol. 6 part I. In *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. By Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour and Richard Marius. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), VI i 372. Hereafter cited as CWM.

<sup>149</sup> More, CWM, 403.

<sup>150</sup> Tyndale "Prologue," 221; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston. (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 89. Originally published as "De seruo arbitrio" in December 1525, it was a response to Erasmus' treatise on free will. Also, cf. Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 319-320. Marius was an editor of *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* and one of the foremost American scholars on More, but he was misinformed on Tyndale's writing on pages 319 and 320, "Tyndale also provided marginal glosses [in his English New Testament] to help the reader interpret the scriptural text. Both glosses and prologue exalt predestination." This is a strange comment when Tyndale actually seems relatively

More believed predestination cut off “the moral rudder by which the Catholic Church had guided Western Civilization.”<sup>151</sup> If this is so, then More may have thought that a society of the elect and non-elect<sup>152</sup> consigned to the civil authorities the responsibility to create a Christian society. To More the abdication of morals to the civil authority was at best naïve, due to the fragility of the state, and at worst potentially disastrous because of the possibility of *coup d’etat* or societal chaos.<sup>153</sup> Thus if the so-called elect see civil authority held by non-elect rulers, the elect will feel obliged to overthrow the regime. Tyndale wrote Obedience as a response to the *reductio ad absurdum* he perceived in

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restrained on the subject. His translation on Romans contains more of these glosses than any other New Testament book he translated and yet he makes no marginal comments whatsoever specifically on predestination and only could be construed to allude to it in an indirect way. This seems remarkable constraint when Romans 9-11 is such a central text for predestinarians. The rest of the New Testament marginalia in the 1534 edition follow this same pattern of greater concern to clarify the translation of the passage and doctrinal restraint. Tyndale does speak of the doctrine positively in his prologue but only devotes one short paragraph to it. On the other hand, one could easily conclude from the above-sited volume of writing that Tyndale’s enemy More is obsessed with the doctrine, and with Tyndale, who even Marius calls “Thomas More’s most formidable intellectual adversary” (317). The collection of his writings on it comprise three thick volumes of his complete works, many more words devoted to the issue than Tyndale did in his extant works.

<sup>151</sup> Marius, Thomas More, 321.

<sup>152</sup> I use the labels elect, believer, saint, and Christian interchangeably in this study, as did Tyndale and others, to describe one who has exercised faith in Christ alone to deliver her or him into a filial relationship with God, and in whom the Holy Spirit has taken up residence. “Elect” emphasizes God’s choice of that person (it may connote one who has been predestined, but not necessarily), “believer” stresses the fact that this person is one who exercises faith in Christ, “saint” (holy one) means that one is set apart for God’s purposes, and “Christian” is a term for one who professes to follow Christ. Tyndale employs all of these labels in his writings.

<sup>153</sup> Marius, Thomas More, 321.

More's attacks that boiled down Tyndale's biblicism, characterizing it as enslavement to some form of Christian fatalism that put society on a fast track to antinomianism.<sup>154</sup>

The first generation of bishops of the English Church after the Act of Supremacy (1534) shared More's uneasiness about predestination. Years after his and Tyndale's deaths, in 1546, the last year of Henry's reign, a convocation of conservative bishops led by Bishop Edmund Bonner of London, included Tyndale's Obedience in their list of proscribed books, identifying twenty-five specific "heresies and errors." John Foxe preserved the content of the Bonner articles and provided his own glosses, often being content to point out that they have twisted Tyndale's true words. The fourth article listed alleges Tyndale's error to be that a Christian is no more to resist an unbelieving ruler than a believing one. Attached to this statement is the objection: "This taketh away freewill."<sup>155</sup>

Tyndale's belief in the bondage of the will is best understood as the individual's complete inability to produce works of any kind that commend him or her to God for the purpose of being delivered from eternal death to eternal life, but in the temporal realm this does not render the believer disinterested in civil affairs. Rather, Tyndale maintained that God requires believers to keep the temporal laws just as he demands of all people. Tyndale particularly stresses that the spirituals of the church are not exempt

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 320-321.

<sup>155</sup> Foxe, Acts and Monuments, V: 578.

from obedience to the powers as the passage states that “every soul” is to submit to those powers.<sup>156</sup> Lest some think, with More, that the episcopate of the Roman Church in general, and the pope in particular, are to be seen as above temporal authority, Tyndale counters with an analogy of faith. Prelates are not to be understood as one of these higher powers mentioned by St. Paul because Jesus taught in John 18 that his kingdom was not of this world.<sup>157</sup> Thus Tyndale shows once again his confidence in the hermeneutic that Scripture must be allowed to interpret Scripture.<sup>158</sup> “Powers” here refers exclusively to the authority wielded by kings and princes.<sup>159</sup> Tyndale preserves the presence of a causative *gar* from the Greek text in his translation of Romans 13:1. In that place St. Paul explained the reason why all, lay and spiritual, are to render obedience: no one can hold the position of king, prince, or magistrate without God’s allowance, and indeed he has ordained or instituted office and officer himself. His interpretation that the king is accountable to no one but God seems startling: “Hereby seest thou that the king is in this world without law and may at his lust do right or

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<sup>156</sup> Tyndale, Obedience, 42-44.

<sup>157</sup> Tyndale and other sixteenth-century writers often refer to members of the clergy, particularly the powerful ones, as “spirituals,” and the clergy as a whole as the “spirituality.” The usage of this term conveys the idea of their distinction as a class apart from the laypeople, or “temporals.” As incipient ideas about the priesthood of all believers were disseminated, Protestants came to embrace more widely a lack of distinction between the secular and the sacred. At the risk of anachronism, to imply that laypeople cannot be spiritual would have been considered politically incorrect.

<sup>158</sup> Tyndale, Obedience, 47.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

wrong and shall give accompts but to God only.”<sup>160</sup> Tyndale appears to introduce an incipient form of divine right absolutism with comments such as this,<sup>161</sup> but he could just as easily be presenting the seeds of future rebellion by reminding rulers that God will hold them accountable to exact vengeance on evildoers. Tyndale taught that as the vernacular Bible became more available to their subjects the rulers’ stewardship arrangement with God would be more widely known. Tyndale maintained that God did not give magistrates their offices to abuse the power of the sword either by warring against other rulers or by defending the pope.<sup>162</sup> Tyndale renders the Greek word *krima* in verse two as “damnation” following St. Paul in saying that this is what they who resist the higher powers can expect, but Tyndale also warns that princes can expect damnation if they allow prelates who have violated the civil laws, particularly using the cloak of clerical immunity, to go unpunished.<sup>163</sup> Even worse than flaunting the law in his estimation is the case of the bishops who flatter their king by bestowing upon him titles to lands that belong to another monarch, thus luring him to enlist his subjects to defend the Crown’s honor by fighting to recover what was never rightly his in the first

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>161</sup> Richard Y. Duerden, “Justice and Justification: King and God in Tyndale’s *The Obedience of a Christian Man*,” *William Tyndale and the Law*, eds. John A. R. Dick and Anne Richardson, *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 25 (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 69-80.

<sup>162</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 47.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 42.

place. Tyndale longs for the princes of Europe to end the papal manipulation that distracts monarchs from their true calling to avenge evil.<sup>164</sup> Rather than blaming those who advocate the teachings of Scripture for bringing about the presence of violence in their realms, princes should instill fear in those, like the prelates, who have worldly motivations for “glory, honour, riches, and dignity.”

Tyndale considers the wording of Romans 13:5 that one must obey the prince out of conscience and not just fear of vengeance, and asserts that the elect are those who need no human compulsion to obey civil ordinances because they are led by the Spirit of God. Tyndale’s discussion recalls Romans 2:15 where the apostle reminds his readers that believers have God’s law written on their hearts and this forms their conscience. This fits with Luther’s view of the passage, in which he says that the consciences of Christian people are bound by God’s law only. Rulers do not receive *carte blanche* authority to employ the sword. Though fear is an appropriate motivator for evildoers, it is wrong to enact false laws that frighten and torment people. Of course, Luther adds, this is exactly what the pope does, and it is why his laws are tyrannical.<sup>165</sup> Tyndale agrees based on 13:5 that the cure for the fleshly person is to receive punishment that causes other subjects without a conscience to beware.<sup>166</sup> The

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>165</sup> Luther, *Bondage*, 89.

<sup>166</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 46.

king with a sword presents a terrifying prospect and should rightly inspire fear, though his divinely-given authority should not lead him to abuse his power by imposing unnecessary exactions and tyrannical rule.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, Christians pay tribute to kings for conscience's sake because rulers are God's servants, and not because they are frightened of his fury. Thus the individual Christian cannot try to figure out what is best for himself, but acts according to his conscience, from the law written on one's heart, because this is what is best for God.<sup>168</sup>

But what about when obedience seems to benefit neither the believer nor, apparently, God, as when an evil person is in a position of power? Can rulers who fail to punish evildoers, cause the elect to suffer, and even positively promote idolatry still be regarded as servants of God whom the followers of Christ are bound to obey? Tyndale answers in the affirmative in his exposition of 13:7. First, Tyndale recalls that St. Paul counseled in Romans 12 that no one is to be recompensed with evil, and in the following context this is especially shown to be the ruler. Instead, they are to give room to the wrath of God according to 12:19. Tyndale rendered the aorist imperative *dote topon* in this verse rather ambiguously. The way he translated the verse could mean one of two things. It could mean that the elect must allow God to vindicate them in the form of the ruler and if the ruler is the offending party that God will directly deal with

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 52.



him. Another possibility is that it means that they must patiently allow the wrath of God that they are experiencing to take its course because God is at work through the evil ruler. Tyndale may well believe the former, but his exposition in Obedience supports the latter because if one has never experienced cumbrance, or harassment and trouble for the sake of one's faith, then the unencumbered person can never distinguish "true faith from a dream."<sup>169</sup> Tyndale believes it is absurd to expect that rulers will always be kind, because the occasion of their abuse is opportunity to receive needed assurance that God's regenerating work through the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit incredibly enables the Christian to render obedience (in ways that do not offend God) to an otherwise recalcitrant ruler. This is consistent with a view Tyndale expressed quite early on in Obedience, in which he summarized his view of the Christian's relationship to the tyrant as that of one in need of chastisement to the chosen instrument of God's discipline:

Therefore let us arm our souls with the comfort of the scriptures. How that God is ever ready at hand in time of need to help us. And how that such tyrants and persecutors are but God's scourge and his rod to chastise us. And as the father hath always in time of correction the rod fast in his hand, so that the rod doth nothing but as the father moveth it: even so hath God all tyrants in his hand and letteth them not do

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibíd.*, 53.

whatsoever they would, but as much only as he appointeth them to do and as farforth it is necessary for us.<sup>170</sup>

But this correction is not just developmental discipline, experiencing the true effects of life in a fallen world. The bestowal of an evil ruler is also truly warranted. He indicates that the saints receive the rulers they deserve, so that instead of complaining about evil rulers they should submit to God's will and humble themselves before him, giving up their own will to live in the way God wants them to live. When they have sincerely bowed to the divine correction and humbled themselves, he will withdraw the punishment like the loving father that he is. At that time, God will either change the hearts of the tyrants or deal forcefully with them if they persist in persecuting. This "putting away" of the tyrant, as Tyndale calls it, has a comforting scriptural precedent, but he leaves the specific example to the reader's imagination.<sup>171</sup> So the civil authorities are a gift from God whether they are good or bad rulers. Because they are ordained of him, whatever they do to their subjects, God does. It is indeed possible that the king who rules over believers may be evil, but he is evil because of the wickedness of the ruled. Resistance is escape from the discipline God deems necessary for Christians. This being true, the one who resists is making matters worse for him- or herself. The proper response is to search out the sin and to repent of it. It is the repentance of the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

people of God that causes the evil heart of the ruler to be removed.<sup>172</sup> The experience of the tyranny of the ruler also has positive benefits in that it makes the Christian more sensitive to the working of the Spirit, which brings great encouragement, and also allows the believer to uncover some secretly harbored sin, which otherwise might have gone undetected while its effects hindered growth.<sup>173</sup>

To Tyndale the higher power of Romans 13 is any magistrate, whether good or evil, whom Christians may find ruling over them. All are in their administrative positions as God's appointed servants, and their service is accomplished in the lives of Christians even if it seems they discharge their duties with impunity. The obedience of Christian subjects signifies that regenerative work has taken place in the life of the believer in that he or she is supernaturally enabled to obey in circumstances when others might rebel. Thus, obedience is confirmation that God is at work in the individual. The command to submit to earthy authorities applies to all who claim to be

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<sup>172</sup> The modern reader could be confused at this point. Is it the fault of believers who have pridefully harbored sin and evaded God's loving chastisement, and who live in a pluralistic society, that wicked rulers lead the nation? Tyndale's exposition would have the saints obey the current administration. He would also expect that God would deliver his people out of tyranny in other ways, but it is not clear if he blames the small bands of Christians under, say, the Turk for that leader's tyranny. This may not be in Tyndale's thinking because he has adopted the uncritical attitude toward the state that was characteristic of Luther and Melancthon. In the Lutheran view the state collaborates with the church and is divinely charged with preserving the order of society, controlling evil, and preserving the good. Torleiv Austad, a professor in the Free Faculty of Theology in Oslo, argues that the great challenge to the Lutheran view of Romans 13 came with the appearance of democratic systems of governance and the advent of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. See Torleiv Austad, "Attitudes Towards the State in Western Theological Thinking," in *Themelios* 16 (October/November 1990): 18-22.

<sup>173</sup> Tyndale, *Obedience*, 56-59.

followers of Christ, and Tyndale particularly points out that prelates of the Church are not exempt from this command. The only exception that Tyndale holds is not clearly defined in his exposition: the Christian is to obey so long as doing so does not dishonor God. The Christian is to obey God rather than men when the ruler's command is in direct violation of the conscience of the Christian man as informed by Scripture.<sup>174</sup> The exceptions to the universal command to submit are lacking in Obedience because the bigger issue to Tyndale is the treachery of the spirituality of the Church. In one of his few departures from biblical illustration he recounts how the prelates were responsible for much mischief by violating the Apostle's command for Christians to obey during the reign of King John (r. 1199-1216). The pope even went so far as to interfere in English affairs by encouraging the King of France to intervene by deposing John, promising the French monarch forgiveness of his sins in exchange for his cooperation.<sup>175</sup>

Tyndale bases his view of the Christian's passive cooperation with the ruler on what he sees as a biblically supported view of society and nature. The relationship of degrees is simply expressed: the inferior is required to obey the superior in any relationship. Tyndale believed that St. Paul was arguing from the need to remind Christians that they may not usurp the laws of the land by pursuing personal revenge. God supports this polar hierarchy in the relationship between ruled and ruler by

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 187.

appointing the ruler and requiring the ruled to obey. Nature, then, is the source of St. Paul's appeal to obey and this makes the command universal and culturally transcendent. Because obedience is according to nature, Romans 13 is applicable to the climate of sixteenth-century Europe. The Emperor and kings must manfully insist upon their authority over the prelates of the Church, who need to repent of their opposition to the teaching and availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular. Tyndale could even approve of a king as earthly head of the Church as long as he remembers that he is God's vice-regent and a brother in Christ to his subjects.<sup>176</sup> Though he was influenced by Luther's views to a large extent, Tyndale's support of a strong monarchy in England is a unique contribution.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps this strong support of the Crown is what Henry VIII sensed in his approving comments about Tyndale's Obedience. It was small consolation when in 1536 he died a martyr's death, strangled and his body burned in a foreign land, having been tricked by an Englishman named Henry Phillips, who hated both Henry Tudor and Tyndale, and later turned traitor to his king and country.<sup>178</sup>

### **Edward Fox and The True Dyfferes**

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>177</sup> Daniell, "A Biography," 224.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 362.

Like his slightly older contemporary William Tyndale, Edward Fox (1496-1538) was a native of Gloucestershire, born in the town of Dursley only four miles southeast of Slimbridge, the probable birthplace of Tyndale.<sup>179</sup> Though there is no evidence extant that he knew Tyndale personally, he was intimately acquainted with George Joye (1495-1553), a former associate of Tyndale's who pirated the latter's 1534 New Testament before the legitimate publisher could release it, and who haphazardly altered Tyndale's translations of passages because of Joye's convictions about the doctrine of bodily resurrection.<sup>180</sup> Joye and Fox had been classmates at King's College, Cambridge, and like Tyndale, Joye was in exile for his beliefs. In June, 1535, Fox interceded on Joye's behalf so that the latter could obtain readmission to England. Fox's appeal was made to Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540), the king's Chief Minister, demonstrating that Fox was willing to risk a great deal on his behalf. Fox further offered Joye safe harbor in his home in Calais while the petition was under consideration.<sup>181</sup> Fox's connection with

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<sup>179</sup> J. Bass Mullinger, "Fox, Edward," Dictionary of National Biography, vol xx., ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1889), 113; Nicholas Esterhazy Stephen Armytage Hamilton, ed., The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. III, (London: Virtue and Co., 1868), s.v. "Slimbridge;" Moynahan, God's Bestseller, 3-4; Daniell, Tyndale, 9-10.

<sup>180</sup> William Tyndale, "Yet Once More to the Christian Reader," Tyndale's New Testament: A Modern-spelling Edition of the 1534 Translation with an Introduction by David Daniell, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 13-15. Joye apparently denied the doctrine of bodily resurrection and his action prompted Tyndale to write an additional preface to the 1534 New Testament revealing what Joye had done and outlining the differences between the genuine and pirated editions. Of thousands of bootlegged copies, only one survives. See Charles C. Butterworth and Allan G. Chester, George Joye, 1495?-1553: A Chapter in the History of the English Bible and the English Reformation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 269-272.

<sup>181</sup> Moynahan, God's Bestseller, 333-334.

Joye suggests the possibility that he was acquainted with Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and his Obedience of the Christian Man.

By early summer 1535, Fox was the king's almoner, a post previously held by Wolsey, and was two months away from election as Bishop of Hereford.<sup>182</sup> On September 2, Henry confirmed his appointment to the bishopric. Fox had rendered great service to Henry when he was a senior researcher in 1528 and 1529, working with Bishop Stephen Gardiner (1497-1555) on the historical and biblical precedents for royal supremacy. He has traditionally been given credit for also providing the possibility of an answer to Henry's "Great Matter" by bringing Thomas Cranmer's helpful proposals about university tribunals to the attention of the king in 1529.<sup>183</sup> He also knew how to navigate the powerful currents of English politics. He had survived, as had Cromwell, his association with the now-disgraced Wolsey. The Cardinal had launched Fox's career after discovering him as a member of the clergy in York.<sup>184</sup> So, when Fox provided safe haven to Joye, it was probably as much due to Fox's growing Lutheran sympathies as to friendship. This boldness in associating with a known heretic must be considered alongside the apparently growing Lutheran convictions of other supporters

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<sup>182</sup> The task of the royal almoner was to represent and manage the king's charitable enterprises and using the resources of the crown, and one's personal capital, to assist the poor.

<sup>183</sup> Mullinger, "Fox," 113. More recent scholarship dismisses the story of Fox's supposedly accidental meeting with Cranmer. See G. R. Elton, Reform & Reformation: England, 1509-1558 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 130.

<sup>184</sup> Mullinger, "Fox," 113-114.

of the supremacy, such as Fox's ally Thomas Cromwell, who was instrumental in bringing reform to the English Church. Fox was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the royal supremacy and perhaps was one of the first to see it as the means of producing ecclesiastical reform. His De Vera Differentia was a digest of both historical and biblical precedents for Henry's authority over the English prelates drawn from the state collection Fox had responsibility to assemble entitled Collectanea Satis Copiosa.<sup>185</sup> Among these crucial texts, he gave Romans 13 and his interpretation of it a central place.

Romans 13 thus appeared as one of the primary biblical texts Fox used to persuade the universities of the justice of Henry's arguments against the papacy in a failed attempt to force the pope's hand through university faculties. Despite its failure, the process eventually led to the break with Rome, the annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, and the declaration of the supremacy of the king as head of the English church.

Originally intended for academics, De Vera Differentia came to be translated into English, and was thus given wider audience, by the chance loan of a book. In the introductory dedication to his translation of Fox's Latin *magnum opus*, Henry, Lord Stafford pictures King Henry VIII as putting on the armor of God's word and driving

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<sup>185</sup> The authorship of De Vera Differentia was disputed until the discovery of Collectanea in the 1970s by Graham Nicholson. See Elton, Reform & Reformation, 135-136; and J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London: University Paperbacks, 1961), 160.



out the pope. The Roman pontiff is dispatched because he was usurping King Henry's regal authority and holding the latter's subjects captive.<sup>186</sup> In looking back on the reign of Henry, Stafford alludes to a passage from the letter attributed to St. Paul to the Ephesians chapter 6 in which the apostle employs the metaphor of the armor to speak of the protective presence of God in the life of the Christian. Essentially, the divine presence in one's life was a protection against the assaults of the greatest enemy of believers—the devil:

Put on the armour of god, that ye may stonde stedfast against the crafty assaultes off the devyll. For we wrestle not agaynst worldly ruelars of the darcknes of this worlde, against spretuall wickedness in heavenly thynges. For this cause take unto you the armoure off god, that ye may be able to resist in the evyll daye, and to stonde perfect in all thinges.<sup>187</sup>

According to Stafford, Henry's fight against the papacy and its interference in his affairs of state was a fight against the devil.<sup>188</sup> The pope's, and thus the devil's strategy was to confuse distinctions. Stafford said that before Fox's book was compiled in 1534 those who wrote about the distinctions between the regal power and the ecclesiastical power

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<sup>186</sup> Edward Fox, The True Dyfferes Between Ye Regall Power and the Ecclesiaticall Power (London: Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbus Terrarum Ltd., 1973), Aii. Originally published in London in 1548.

<sup>187</sup> William Tyndale, trans. The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale: The Text of the Worms Edition of 1526 in Original Spelling, ed. W. R. Cooper (London: British Library, 2000), 415. Hereafter cited as WTNT.

<sup>188</sup> In applying it to Henry VIII, Stafford is employing a commonly understood individualist interpretation of the passage, another notable hermeneutical approach encouraged by the Reformation. St. Paul may have in mind that the body of believers as a corporate entity are to don the armor. See Ephesians 6:11.

either did not clearly understand the difference or did not define the issues well.<sup>189</sup>

However, Fox's concern in the book was not at all to give the devil his due, but quite the opposite, to show the superiority of the king over the primates of the church and to argue that the clergy must not seek to be even a part of the higher powers. Fox's convictions are hardly remarkable given his increasing distance from association with the cleric-statesman Wolsey.

The original work was Fox's, perhaps aided by Thomas Cranmer, but its larger influence came from the enthusiasm of Stafford and Sir Richard Morison (1510-1556).<sup>190</sup> Stafford would have the readers of his translation believe that he was captive to the same perplexity about the distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities when Morison<sup>191</sup> loaned him a copy of Fox's book. Fox explained these differences in a way that Stafford found satisfying and became convinced of the need for the work to be translated into English. It is remarkable that Stafford seemed to be previously unfamiliar with this particular work of Fox's, and Morison was more acquainted with it due to his work as propagandist to Henry. This was a position Morison held in common with Fox during the last years of the latter's life. Still a young man when Fox

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<sup>189</sup> Fox, *The True Dyfferes*, Aii.

<sup>190</sup> Elton, *Reform & Reformation*, 135n.

<sup>191</sup> Richard Morison, *Humanist Scholarship and Public Order: Two Tracts against the Pilgrimage of Grace*, ed. David Sandler Berkowitz (Washington: Folger Books, 1984). Originally published as two separate tracts in 1536.

died, Morison's star brightened until he became the ambassador of Edward VI to the court of Charles V in 1550, but his deputation ended just before the young king died and his older sister Mary came to the throne in 1553. Morison, who was being recalled before Edward's death anyway, was responsible for initially souring England's deteriorating relations with Charles V by his open espousal of Protestant, and therefore in Charles's view heretical, opinions at the imperial court.<sup>192</sup> Morison, who during his tenure as ambassador was called "a man remarkable for his genius, his culture and the favour of our prince,"<sup>193</sup> defended the late adolescent king in a retrospective account that told of Edward's willingness to go to war with Charles in 1551. Later in exile from Mary's reign and living on the Continent, Morison contended that England had been unworthy of her young king and thus God had sent a tyrant instead. His sentiments recalled Tyndale's view that in the end a people get the ruler they deserve.<sup>194</sup>

The ongoing interest in Fox's work on the part of prominent Edwardian nobles like Stafford and Morison shows the influential place De Vera Differentia occupied a

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<sup>192</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 37-39. See also Max H. Fisch, "Vesalius in English State Papers," Bulletin of the Medical Library for Association. April 1945; 33 (2): 237 for an analysis of how Morison may have actually negatively affected the Emperor's health even as he provided valuable reports of the state of it.

<sup>193</sup> John Leland to Beatus Rhenanus 1 June 1539. Sélestat, Bibliothèque humaniste, letter 223r.

<sup>194</sup> MacCulloch, The Boy King, 39;

decade after the Fox's death in London in 1538.<sup>195</sup> Stafford was so helped by the categories explained by Fox, and so confident of Fox's thesis that he decided to translate the work into English. He offers his translation "to the indyfferent judgement of all lerned readers," so the intended audience is English-speakers who are educated enough to be able to compare his rendering with the Latin from which it is translated.<sup>196</sup> He dedicates the translation to young King Edward that the latter might be preserved by God to the advancement to God's glory, the honor of the king's majesty, and the profit of his people. The dedication is perhaps purposely ambiguous: does he mean God's people or the king's subjects when he suggests that "his people" will profit?<sup>197</sup>

Fox offered a plain approach to Romans 13 and used the text to prove the point that the higher authorities mentioned by the apostle were lay powers and not civil, and that prelates are obligated to obey these lay powers just like everyone else. He admits of the usual exception to this exhortation that they are to be obeyed so long as the authorities "commaunded nothings contrary to god."<sup>198</sup> Fox's usage of Romans 13 may be compared to that of Stephen Gardiner in the latter's defense of royal supremacy, De Vera Obedientia. In one of his few direct references to the Romans 13 passage—odd for

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<sup>195</sup> This was also the year that De Vera Differentia was reprinted by the King's printer. See Elton, Reform & Reformation, 135.

<sup>196</sup> Fox, The True Dyfferes, Aii verso.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Fox, The True Dyfferes, fo. lxix verso.

a sixteenth-century work that treats the subject of obedience—Gardiner’s concern was to demonstrate the principle of the particular vice-regency of princes, who are to be respected and obeyed because they stand in the place of God. In 1535 Gardiner, like Fox, was convinced that the spirituality must themselves acknowledge that princes were called by God. In fact, it was in keeping with the degrees of creation that prelates obey the temporal rulers as God’s representatives.<sup>199</sup>

Fox begins his exposition of Romans 13 after an extended section of expositions of Old Testament and Apocryphal passages supporting the power of kings. The context for the exposition is a discussion of how various New Testament passages, particularly from the Gospel of Matthew, confirm the power of kings as distinct and superior to that of bishops and priests. Before turning to Romans, he began the section with an exposition of the Matthew 17 passage in which taxes (poll money) are asked through St. Peter of Christ. Jesus responds by asking St. Peter a rhetorical question: of whom do kings take tribute? Christ goes on to state that so as not to offend the royal powers, he will send St. Peter to catch a fish in whose mouth he will find a groat<sup>200</sup> (Greek, *statera*) for the fisherman to pay the tax both for himself and for Christ. Fox says by this Christ shows that the authority of kings should be honored: because he has oversight or

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<sup>199</sup> Stephen Gardiner, *De Vera Obedientia*, trans. John Bale? (Leeds: The Scolar Press Ltd., 1963), fo. xvi, verso. Originally published in London in October, 1553.

<sup>200</sup> An English coin worth four pence.

charge over people he should expect his reward for diligence and labor. Then Fox includes a familiar verse from Matthew 22—where Christ tells some hostile interrogators to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. Fox ends his section of analogical passages with a brief restatement illustrating God’s permitting of human governments (and their stewardship of capital powers) from the Gospel of St. John. In St. John 19 Jesus tells Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, that he has no power against Christ unless it is given to him from above.<sup>201</sup>

Fox gave more space to the exposition of the Romans passage than he did to any other relevant verses, and the structure of his exposition of Romans 13 is clear and concise. Fox’s thesis is that all men, including all levels of the clergy, are to obey the lay civil authorities so long as they require nothing contrary to God’s commands. His arguments can be summarized as two syllogisms. In the first place he attempted to show that bishops and priests are spirituals and therefore not to be involved in civil affairs. Prelates cannot be the higher powers and thus the civil authorities are lay powers. This aspect of Fox’s argument may be represented as follows:

Major premise: Bearing the sword (capital judgments) is the duty of the civil authority.

Minor premise: By Christ’s command no clergy are to bear the sword.

Conclusion: No clergy are to have the duty of the civil authority.

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<sup>201</sup> Fox, The True Dyfferes, fo. lxxvii recto.

Second, Fox wanted to demonstrate that the clergy had an obligation in common with all people to submit themselves to the higher powers. This may be represented with the following simple syllogism:

Major premise: According to the apostle's teaching in Romans 13, all men are to be those who submit themselves to the lay powers, without exception.

Minor premise: All clergy are included under "all men" (every soul).

Conclusion: All clergy are to be those who submit themselves to the lay power.

Stafford's prose does not employ Tyndale's rendering of Romans 13, but a direct translation of Fox's selective excerpt of the chapter. He begins the exposition by quoting verses one through four out of order and incompletely. Except for the words of verse six contained in a supporting quotation from Augustine, he only alludes to these four verses in his exposition. Fox opens with the observation that St. Paul says, "Every man is to be obedient and subject," a conflated presentation of the apostle's words. His understanding of Romans 13:1 is literal, but he does not suggest an historical context to the passage. Instead, he takes this as having universal application that enfolds the clergy.

For Fox there were clearly no exceptions to the command to obey the higher powers and there are numerous biblical examples that complement St. Paul's passage. St. Paul himself submitted to civil authority, as did St Peter. No spiritual figure is excused from deference to the civil authority, from the lowest parish priest to the most

exalted apostle, and only one who would invite God's condemnation could resist the imperative to obey:

He excepteth no man at all nether Peter nor Paule, no preest, no bysshoppe, no Cardinal; no patriarcke no Pope onles any man be willing to get his damnacion.<sup>202</sup>

Fox employs the ubiquitous Protestant principle of analogy of faith to show that St. Paul must have included spirituals in the sphere of those who were expected to obey.

Furthermore, the clergy should avoid holding civil offices. Christ, says Fox, taught elsewhere in the New Testament that prelates were to "flee and refuse" the offer of superior authority, apparently because the chief characteristic of princely power was the employment of the sword. There is no marginal note provided to suggest the passage from which Fox draws the statement that Christ commanded priests to decline civil office.<sup>203</sup>

The power in view in the passage is civil and not ecclesiastical. Fox says that the common interpretation of sword in this passage is "power in judgements." These temporal judgments are assigned by lay authorities exclusively. The sharp distinction between clergy and laity stands in contrast to Luther's model of spiritual vocation that emphasized the possibility for devoted Christians to serve in a variety of occupational

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<sup>202</sup> Fox, The True Dyfferes, fo. lxviii recto.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., verso. It is most likely that Fox is alluding to Christ's teaching about servanthood given to the disciples in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:42; Luke 22:25) in which Jesus says that "playing the tyrant" (*katakuriuousin*, Matthew 20:25) is not acceptable among those who follow him, who instead must become the servants of [you] all (*humōn diakonos*).



contexts, including that of magistrate. The division serves Fox's purpose well and is pictured by the differing symbols of office. Rather than the representation of judgmental power, the bishop bears the tokens of ecclesiastical and pastoral authority, the mitre and crook. Fox cites Origen's agreement with this exposition of St. Paul in saying that judges, (of the world) and not bishops and overseers are to execute most of the punishments God wants carried out. Since St. Paul knew God had vested this right to exact temporal punishment in the lay authority, he called the king the minister of God and the judge of him who does ill. Further, they do violence to Scripture who attempt to identify bearing the sword or the higher powers with ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>204</sup>

Fox's main interest in expositing Romans 13 was to show that St. Paul's teaching stands in agreement with the practice of Christ and the apostles in excluding the clergy from participating as civil officials. Not only are the clergy excluded, but they are also to accept their subject position along with other people. Fox used a reasoned line of attack in demonstrating that civil, and not ecclesiastical authority, is in view in this passage. To Fox the identity of the higher powers is that of people who serve as magistrates, the lay rulers. Fox, however, assumes that the lay authorities are themselves Christians, and like Henry VIII, are fit to govern the English Church. The exigence of Romans 13, according to Fox, relates to the extent of the command to

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<sup>204</sup> Fox, The True Dyfferes, fo. lxx verso - fo. lxx recto.

submission, which he believes to include the clergy of England. The reason for his exposition was originally the need to collect biblical and historical artifacts that supported the supremacy claims of King Henry VIII. Fox's treatise appealed to its Edwardian Protestant translator because of its continued relevance to an English church that was attempting reform but was frustrated by reactionary Henrician bishops. Fox reads that this lay authority, outlined in Romans 13, has the power to judge or mete out the temporal punishment God intends for evil doers. Thus Fox holds the usual limitations to St. Paul's command held by the plain reading of the traditional non-resistance view. The power to judge in civil matters holds everyone, including those who hold ecclesiastical office, accountable to the civil or lay authority. As long as the civil authority does not command anything contrary to God they are always to be obeyed, but Fox, in his usual terse style does not offer much information about what he means when he says "contrary to God." He does not specify whether he means that which is opposed to what God has revealed in the Bible, or that which is natural and reasonable. Though it may seem strange for one who is searching for historical precedents, he does not offer any historical interpretation of the passage, so that the reader cannot know how St. Paul's injunction is to be applied under characteristically evil or non-Christian rulers. These are beyond the purpose of one, like Fox, who has early Tudor England in mind. Thus Fox's view lacks portability to other possible political economies. Fox also says that this interpretation reflects the view of the most

important and best commentators he had available to him, which shows a concern with verification of his exegesis. He shows little interest in philological concerns except for his emphasis on “every soul” to include both laity and clergy under St. Paul’s imperative. He also shows a strong tendency, typical of reformist exegetes, to employ *analogia fidei* in his attempt to understand the passage.

### **Tyndale’s John Hooper: A Nonconformist Approach to Romans 13**

John Hooper (1495-1555) is best remembered as one of the most influential, controversial, and popular preachers during the reign of Edward VI, and who became the center of a vestments controversy with Thomas Cranmer that delayed his consecration as the Bishop of Gloucester. A product of Merton College, Oxford, and a former Cistercian monk who had converted to Protestantism, Hooper had become personal chaplain to Sir Thomas Arundel (d. 1552) in 1539.<sup>205</sup> John Foxe records that

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<sup>205</sup> Charles Nevinson, “Biographical Notice of Bishop Hooper,” Later Writings of Bishop Hooper, Together with His Letters and Other Pieces, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852), vii-viii. Hooper took the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1518. Between 1518 and 1539 very little is known of his life, except that he refers to himself as having been a courtier during part of this time, and that he was converted by reading Zwingli and Bullinger’s commentaries on St. Paul’s epistles. His attachment to Arundel is ironic. Arundel, who objected to Hooper’s Protestant views was a descendant of the early fifteenth-century Lord Chancellor Thomas Fitzalan (d. 1414), Earl of Arundel, who was noted for his tireless persecution of Lollards. During the reign of Edward VI, another relative, Henry Fitzalan (d. 1580) became member of the king’s council and a chief supporter of John Dudley, Earl of Warwick (later the Duke of Northumberland) against the Lord Protector, uncle of Edward VI. According to John Ponet, Henry Fitzalan had helped Dudley to falsify documents. See John Ponet, A Short Treatise of Politicke Power, and of the True Obedience which Subjectes Owe to Kings and Other Ciuile Gouvernours, with an Exhortacion to All True Naturall Englishe Men, Compyled by D. I. P. B. R. W I iii verso, and “Notes to the diary: 1552,” The Diary of Henry Machyn: Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London (1550-1563) (1848), pp. 323-28.

Arundel discovered his reformed opinions and dispatched him to Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, for rehabilitation. Both Gardiner and Hooper were unmoved by the interviews, which lasted four to five days, but Gardiner bore a grudge against Hooper that would eventually lead to the demise of the latter.<sup>206</sup>

Hooper began to sense his life was in danger and fled to the Continent, where he spent nine years. While there Hooper was married. He also befriended Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) and Polish reformer Jan Łasco (1499-1560), and grew more fixed in his reformed opinions. After the accession of Edward VI, Hooper returned to England in May, 1549 to become chaplain to the Duke of Somerset. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and Nicholas Ridley had apparently become familiar with Hooper during his self-imposed exile, but if he was not well known at that time, he certainly became well-known to the leaders of the English Reformation after he returned from the Continent and achieved the reputation of being perhaps the most popular preacher in England.<sup>207</sup> Cranmer was wary about Hooper's ties to the Zurich

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<sup>206</sup> Hooper also made a bitter enemy of Edmund Bonner (d. 1569), who was later, along with Stephen Gardiner, one of the leaders of the Marian restoration. Hooper had publicly called attention to Bonner's errors in a sermon at Paul's Cross that resulted in a bill of complaint and imprisonment for the latter. Hooper, in a characteristically prophetic way is supposed to have said of his conflict with Bonner, "Should he again be restored to his office and episcopal function, I shall, I doubt not, be restored to my country and my Father which is in heaven." Nevinson, "Biographical Notice," xi.

<sup>207</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Five English Reformers* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 47. Originally published as *Light From Old Times* (London: W. Hunt & Co., 1891).

reformers and sensed he had become a leader of nonconformity, but approved of his preaching mission: to turn the people from Anabaptism.<sup>208</sup>

As preparation for higher office, Cranmer ordered Hooper to preach a series of Lenten sermons before the young king, at the conclusion of which he was nominated to fill the vacant bishopric at Gloucester. The position was hardly a reward for his homiletic performance. But Hooper somehow initially maintained the high esteem of some members of the king's council though he used the sermon series as an opportunity to attack the legally required oath of supremacy as blasphemous and the practice of priests wearing vestments as unchristian.<sup>209</sup> The oath was sworn by bishops at the time of their consecration. Hooper's objection was not that an oath took place, but that the language of the oath contained what Hooper termed "a shameful and impious form," in which the bishop-elect was required to swear by the saints, clearly a Romish intrusion and a blasphemy.<sup>210</sup> To Cranmer's consternation and embarrassment, Hooper refused the bishopric because of the hated requirement to wear vestments. Summoned before the entire Privy Council, Hooper was allowed to state the reasons why he believed he could lawfully decline the king's appointment. He was

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<sup>208</sup> Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 308.

<sup>209</sup> Hooper specifically calls it "shameful and impious." John Hooper to Heinrich Bullinger, 29 June 1550, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation, Written During the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: Chiefly from the Archives of Zurich*, trans. and ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), I:87.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

persuasive, as Edward subsequently removed the oath, and other members of the king's council were also persuaded by Hooper. They urged the king to make an exception for Hooper that honored his conscience concerning the matter. It was suggested that he be allowed to refrain from wearing the ceremonial garb in carrying out his duties. After all, Gloucester was a long distance from court, and the attitude toward reform measures was growing increasingly positive among the council. Cranmer, however, reacted indignantly to Hooper's sermons and engaged Nicholas Ridley, bishop of London, as his ally in insisting that Hooper conform to the ordinances as prescribed by civil law concerning the wearing of vestments. He dispatched Ridley to persuade Hooper to comply with the requirement on the grounds that the wearing of priestly gowns was adiaphoristic, and became angered by Hooper's stubbornness. Ridley even offered to allow him to refrain from wearing vestments in the disposition of his duties if he would publicly retract his position and subscribe to the requirement, but Hooper refused.<sup>211</sup> That Cranmer and Ridley were attempting to make an example of Hooper on account of his perceived extremism and popularity with London Protestants became evident when, in the summer of 1550, Cranmer and Ridley ordained Thomas Sampson a priest without requiring him to wear the prescribed vestments. This was significant because Sampson had objected to vestments on similar grounds to Hooper. It is hardly possible

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<sup>211</sup> Nevinson, "Biographical Notice," xii-xiii.

that Cranmer could have suspected Hooper of being a rebel as he would demonstrate himself to be a champion of non-resistance to civil authority.<sup>212</sup>

Cranmer eagerly sought the advice of Martin Bucer (1491-1551), the reformer of Strasbourg, who had fled the Continent in 1547 after the armies of Charles V defeated the German Protestants at the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547 and restored largely Roman Catholic ecclesiastical structure to southern Germany. Bucer, now Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, clearly sympathized with Hooper and wished that vestments would eventually be eliminated in the English Church. However, Bucer agreed with his host Cranmer that God was not offended by vestments, and that one who refused to wear them had a scruple offensive to God and in defiance of the magistrate.<sup>213</sup> Peter Martyr concurred with Bucer in a subsequent letter to Hooper, though Hooper's friend, Jan Łasco, now in England, supported his defiant position.<sup>214</sup>

The king's council withdrew Hooper's license to preach, and he responded by criticizing them in print. The council remanded him to Cranmer's custody to rehabilitate or punish as he willed. On January 27, 1551 Cranmer sent him to the Fleet prison, which softened Hooper and he was released after less than a month. Cranmer's

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<sup>212</sup> Ridley, 309-310.

<sup>213</sup> Thomas Cranmer to Martin Bucer, 2 December 1550, Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 428; Martin Bucer, Scripta Anglicana Fere Omnia, ed. C. Hubertus (Basel: P. Perna, 1577), 681.

<sup>214</sup> Nevinson, "Biographical Notice," xiv.

objective now satisfied, a compromise was reached with the nonconforming Hooper.

On March 8 he was consecrated as Bishop of Gloucester on the condition that he would don vestments when he preached on public occasions, in the cathedral, or before the king. At all other times he could refrain.<sup>215</sup> Later that summer he was also consecrated Bishop of Worcester and the two dioceses were united into one in December 1551.

Hooper was clearly objecting to vestments on grounds that their requirement by civil law was contrary to the law of God. Though his open criticism of the king's council is inconsistent with his later assertion, based on Romans 13 and Exodus 21, that obedience is owed to the magistrate "hand, heart, and tongue," he applied his view of non-resistance with greater maturity when he actively supported Mary's claim to the throne upon the death of Edward VI in 1553, though he was subsequently deprived of his bishopric by Gardiner during the time he unlawfully detained, first at the Fleet prison on false charges beginning in September 1553, and later at several other prisons where he was held on the charge of having been married.<sup>216</sup>

Hooper had a strong concern for pastoral care and the education of the laity, whom he considered to be largely unconverted in his diocese and in the realm at large. Upon accession to the bishopric of Gloucester, he drew up a visitation book for the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>216</sup> John Hooper, "Letter XLVIII," in Later Writings of Bishop Hooper, Together with His Letters and Other Pieces, ed. Charles Nevinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852), 619-621; Nevinson, xxii-xxiv.



clergy of his diocese containing fifty articles of doctrine and praxis to which they were to subscribe for “unity and agreement.”<sup>217</sup> This unity and agreement touched upon their relationship to the civil authorities. Article VI of the visitation book objects to the doctrine of the Anabaptists, not only on the basis of their rebaptism practices,, but also because of their exclusion of magistrates from church governance.<sup>218</sup> In article XXXIV he states that “the king’s majesty of England is to be taken and known as the only and supreme magistrate and power of the church of England and Ireland.”<sup>219</sup> The final article exhorts the clergy to be diligent to read and study the Scriptures according to the king’s injunctions.<sup>220</sup> In keeping with his well-documented concerns that the clergy obey the king’s ordinances, Hooper published his annotations on Romans 13 in May 1551. The purpose of the commentary was to aid the clergy in carrying out a new duty as prescribed by Hooper: to teach their people Romans 13 every week in three parts. Saturdays at even-song the clergy were to teach the first part of the chapter answering the question of why the magistrates were to be obeyed. Sunday at morning prayers, they were to explain to parishioners how they owed a debt to love both magistrates and non-magistrate without distinction. Finally, Sunday even-song brought exhortations

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<sup>217</sup> John Hooper, “A True Coppey of Bishop Hooper’s Visitation Booke,” Later Writings, 120.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 129.

related to Romans 13 that concerned an honest and innocent life.<sup>221</sup> Hooper chided the rich people of Gloucester especially, but of the entire realm generally, for failure to obey the king's laws with respect to compassion for the poor. But Hooper's strongest concern seemed to be the frustration of the poor people, partly motivated by envy of the rich, to conspire "against God's laws, God's ordinances, magistrates and superior powers, take away and usurp every man's goods, he careth not how."<sup>222</sup> His remarks follow the structure of Cranmer's well publicized "Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion," which was polished by Peter Martyr.<sup>223</sup> The sermon was a response to Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk, which had removal of land enclosures as its primary objective, but also called for relief of the poor. The rebellion, led by a tanner, Robert Kett, excited the fears of the country in the summer of 1549, though the poorly armed insurgents were finally cruelly dispatched by the Earl of Warwick. Condemned for treason, Kett and his brother William were hanged at Norwich castle in December.<sup>224</sup> While Kett awaited execution, Cranmer's sermon denied that the rebels had authority to

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<sup>221</sup> John Hooper, "Godly and Most Necessary Annotations in Ye XIII Chapter too the Romaynes: Set Furth by the Right Vigilant Pastor, Jhon Hoper, by Gods Calling Busshop of Gloucestre," Later Writings of Bishop Hooper, Together with His Letters and Other Pieces, ed. Charles Nevinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852), 98, 101.

<sup>222</sup> Hooper, "Godly and Most Necessary Annotations," 97.

<sup>223</sup> Cranmer, "A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion," Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 190.

<sup>224</sup> J. D. Mackie, The Earlier Tudors 1485-1558 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 189-191.

act against gentlemen, arguing that the reformation of the commonwealth was given by God to the magistrates. To these rulers God willed that all men, meaning their subjects, must be obedient.<sup>225</sup>

In calling for lessons of obedience from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, Hooper, with full cognizance of his accountability to God for their souls, urged the people of Gloucestershire to be quiet and unified. He feared the secret sedition of the "runagates" (renegades) who frequent the taverns of his diocese. The clergy were to learn to detest these blasphemers to speak against the divine ordinance.<sup>226</sup> He drew upon Cranmer's categories of ruler and ruled in his pre-understanding of the text of Romans 13.

Hooper thus prefaced his comments on Romans 13 by drawing a distinction between public and private persons and defining each category. He identifies the higher powers of Romans 13 as being those public persons. Public persons as those "that bear any office, rule, regiment or dominion, in a commonwealth." Private persons are those who are the subjects under public persons. Hooper maintained that Romans 13 is about living in truth and honesty toward both public and private persons.<sup>227</sup> Though he makes it clear that public persons may be any authorities appointed underneath the monarch, it is the monarch himself who is the one appointed by God to

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<sup>225</sup> Cranmer, "A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion," 193.

<sup>226</sup> Hooper, "Godly and Most Necessary Annotations," 103.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

rule. The king's appointees are to be obeyed as the monarch's representatives and are owed the same "obedience, honour, reverence and love" they are to give the king himself.<sup>228</sup> The chief appeal of the historical context of Romans to Hooper the exegete is the similarities of the ancient and contemporary contexts. Just as the lay people of England languish in biblical ignorance as prey for ignorant or deceptive clergy, so St. Paul penned the teaching about the obedience of the Christian man in response to the prelates of his day who were responsible for rebellion and sedition.<sup>229</sup> As throughout the Tudor period, creative materials were needed to support the obedience of the people to the king. The New Testament doctrine of obedience was particularly significant for the health of the reign of Edward VI. Hooper insists on this obedience to the young monarch, using another ubiquitous Old Testament comparison to the reign of Josiah, and reminding the Gloucestershire clergy, who are the intended audience of his gloss, that the age of the ruler does not release any subject from commanded obedience.<sup>230</sup> As Hooper urged the clergy in various contexts, the clergy are not exempt from obedience to the magistrates. The former laws that exempted prelates from

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 102.

obedience to the higher powers that were lay authority were “damnable and heretical, manifestly condemned by the word of God.”<sup>231</sup>

Hooper gives a well-structured exposition of the non-resistance position. The personal spiritual or moral condition of the magistrate does not excuse private persons from their obligation to obey. St. Paul does not provide a caveat based on the “manners and condition” of the ruler, but points the reader to their power and divinely-given authority. Public persons are people with an office that is to be respected at all times, even when they are people of questionable character, and that which they command out of their office is to be obeyed, unless they command their subjects to do that which is against God’s laws. Hooper seeks to clarify this vague caveat by describing two kinds of laws of magistrates: laws that pertain to God and laws that pertain to man.<sup>232</sup>

Hooper suggests that rulers can make positive laws, but these laws are either in harmony with the word of God or they are contrary to the word of God. As to those that are in harmony, they are the laws that St. Paul refers to when he says that he who resists will receive the pain of damnation. Hooper seems to hold that this damnation is more than temporal punishment, but a just eternal punishment for those who characteristically resist duly constituted authority. He may have had in mind what he perceived as the large number of English Catholics who presented a potential rebellious

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 102.

faction. In an earlier letter to Bullinger he wrote, “a great portion of the kingdom so adheres to the popish faction, as altogether to set at nought God and the lawful authority of the magistrates; so that I am greatly afraid of rebellion and civil discord.”<sup>233</sup>

In his exigence for writing a commentary upon the prescribed passage, Hooper evidences a deep concern that class strife presents a danger to the realm and warns of the great danger that unrepentant individuals have placed themselves in, particularly the callous wealthy:

And the cause why I have written in this chapter more than another, and think it very expedient to be now taught unto the people, is the great and dangerous offenses and sins of the richer sort of people, and also of the poor, both in this shire, and other the king’s majesty’s in this realm. And certain I am that both of them shall die eternally, if they amend not.<sup>234</sup>

If the laws of the magistrate are in contradiction to the word of God they should not be obeyed. He does not address the eternal destination of those who obey laws opposed to the word of God, but reminds those who are justified in disobeying that they still must be prepared to suffer for their convictions without defending themselves. Death at the hands of the ruler is preferable to defending oneself by violence. The examples of this kind of passivity are abundant in the Scriptures, being found in the examples of Christ,

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<sup>233</sup> John Hooper to Heinrich Bullinger, 25 June 1549, Original Letters, I:65-66.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets. Active disobedience, even to wicked laws, is not permitted.<sup>235</sup>

The second kind of laws enacted by magistrates fit in the category of what Hooper calls laws that pertain to man. These laws must be obeyed unless they are found to be contrary to the laws of nature. Hooper provides a strange illustration from Exodus 1 to support his contention about laws contrary to nature:

If the laws concern and appertain unto man, and unto things civil, they must simply, without exception, be obeyed, except they repugn and be contrary to the law of nature: as Pharoah's laws and commandment was to the midwives, that they should have killed all the men-children that the Israelites brought forth.<sup>236</sup>

The midwives are those who are naturally called to give life, and that they are commanded to distinguish between the sexes of the children and thus selectively end life is contrary to nature. It may be within the purview and even required of the ruler to make use of the sword, the retributive power of dealing death to those who do evil. However, to kill those who are innocent, or immature, is opposed to nature and private persons are not obligated to obey.

Hooper sees in the Romans passage three primary reasons why private persons are obligated to obey magistrates. First, God ordained rulers in their offices. Sometimes it seems that wicked people occupy those offices and obtain them by questionable means, but Hooper says that "God suffers it" and so private persons are

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

obligated to obey. God's purposes are trustworthy and even bad rulers are to be accorded dignity and honor simply on the basis that God has appointed them.

Employing another common illustration, Hooper says that this is why magistrates are called "gods" (*elohim*) in Exodus 22 and Psalm 82, because no one can acquire the office except by God's permission. Second, it is complete folly to resist the one who God ordains. Those who violently or forcefully resist the magistrate do so at pain of their eternal souls. His office is defended by God and any treason or rebellion is damnable sin. No private person can presume to depose even wicked magistrates. As in the ancient examples of those who sought to depose divinely constituted authority, such as Absalom, Cataline, Brutus, and Cassius, God will take vengeance on the rebel. The rebel fights against God's anointed and is bound to lose, and the one who engages in such folly can only find hope in repenting and desisting from their evil course.<sup>237</sup> The third reason why magistrates should be obeyed has to do with what Hooper calls their commodity. St. Paul advances positive qualities about rulers and why God has appointed them when he writes, "For rulers be not to be feared of such as do well, but of such as do evil." Magistrates provide a useful societal peace that enables private persons to pursue the enterprises to which God has called each of them. Rulers accomplish this when they correct and punish evildoers, thus enabling honest members

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 103-105.



of society to live in peace. If the private person has a respect for God's ordained order then he or she does well and has no need to fear the magistrate.<sup>238</sup>

Though Hooper does not address the issue of whether the monarchs are outside the law, he does remind the magistrates that God holds them accountable for how they manage their stewardship. It is not enough for the magistrate to have the power of the sword, he must also use it. To Hooper the sword represents power over life and the magistrate must be willing to punish, and even kill, evildoers if the law requires it. But the one who wields the sword must be sure to do so with justice. It is God who executes the evildoer when the magistrate employs capital punishment justly, but if the ruler executes unjustly he is a murderer. If he releases a justly convicted offender based on his own judgment God holds the magistrate responsible for the injustice. The magistrate enjoys a great advantage in that God does not permit the private person to rebel, but God holds the ruler responsible for neither creating nor enforcing laws contrary to the word of God. The magistrate must constantly remember that God avenges the abuse of office just as surely as he punishes the private person's disobedience to higher powers. Positively, the magistrate is to defend, help, and preserve the good, and to administer justice indifferently, without respect to persons. He must defend just causes and condemn unjust ones. He has God's word to guide and advise him: there is no place for pride of office because he is God's servant. Armed

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 105-107.

with the truth, he must be tireless to root out false and superstitious religion as well as those who hinder God's flock, and plant true and godly religion as they maintain the true flock of Christ, his Church.<sup>239</sup>

Hooper's strong pastoral concern is evidenced by his interpretation of Romans 13:1-7, which stands as a paradigm of how proponents of the non-resistance model use the text as foundational to their view of obedience. He had no sense of the historical context of the passage and interpreted it as if the apostle were directly addressing the concerns of a professedly Christian kingdom, rather than a Christian minority within the Roman Empire of the first century. Rebels who seek to depose God's appointed order by violence are evidently unregenerate. Because Edward VI so closely resembles the godly Josiah of the Old Testament, a person like Robert Kett, who would rebel against the young king, could only be an accursed renegade who is behaving in accord with his hellish eternal destiny. Nevertheless, even if the ruler is evil he is to be obeyed unless he triggers the usual caveats by commanding that which is opposed to God's revealed word or to the laws of nature. Even when the private person must disobey, it must be carried out in a non-violent way that demonstrates an respect for the magistrate with a willingness to accept even the most dire consequences for following one's conscience. At the same time, the magistrate must use the sword, and justly, in dispatching evildoers. To execute without justice or to free guilty criminals is

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<sup>239</sup> Hooper, "Godly and Most Necessary Annotations," 104-108.

reprehensible and the magistrate who exercises his high office with pride and without justice will be held responsible in the same way disobedient subjects are judged. As uncompromising as Hooper was initially in the Vestments Controversy, he was willing to be sent to the Fleet for his convictions, even though almost no other Protestant divine agreed that wearing of ceremonial garb as a member of the clergy was an important enough issue for which to suffer.

Hooper was a believer in non-resistance who remained true to his understanding of Romans 13. Like Tyndale he was committed to the text regardless of external circumstances. Though Hooper was used to being in the center of controversy, and was able to drive those like Bishop of London Nicholas Ridley to great frustration by his stubbornness, in the end he stayed true to his conviction to obey with “hand, heart, and tongue.” He recognized the legitimacy of Mary’s claim to the throne and refused to flee the country although remaining placed him at the mercy of vengeful enemies Edmund Bonner and Stephen Gardiner, subjected him to the loss of his position, and exposed him to cruel and sadistic abuse as a prisoner. In the end, Hooper was taken to Gloucester and executed. The day of his execution was windy and he was bound to the stake with an iron hoop so that he could be burned. The wood used for the fire was too green, the fire had to be relit several times and he suffered greatly before he died.<sup>240</sup> Before being bound to the stake he had been led out of his cell by a large group of

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<sup>240</sup> Nevinson, “Biographical Notice,” xxviii-xxvix.

armed deputies. Hooper was irritated that the authorities had made such a production of escorting him securely to the stake. He is said to have sternly rebuked them as one who held passivity to the civil authority as a firm conviction: "Master Sheriffs, I am no traitor, neither needed you to have made such a business to bring me to the place where I must suffer: for if you had willed me, I would have gone alone to the stake, and have troubled none of you all."<sup>241</sup>

## **The Homilies**

Late in the reign of Henry VIII, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer set out to address the issue of illiterate or misinformed preaching in the wake of a reformation that placed great emphasis on an educated clergy. Cranmer compiled a collection of twelve anonymous homilies, some of which he wrote while others were farmed out to other prominent clergy, some of whom, like Edmund Bonner and Stephen Gardiner showed less creative innovation than that produced by the restless mind of Cranmer. This Book of Homilies was presented to the Convocation of 1543, the assembly of clergy for the ecclesiastical province of Canterbury, but the collection did not have a significant impact until after the accession of Edward VI. In the summer of 1548, after a series of delays perhaps caused by the objections to its contents by at least one of the contributing authors, the homilies were published. The primary objection had been

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

raised by Gardiner, who reacted against the homily on justification by faith for being at odds with the teaching contained in Henry VII's King's Book, issued in 1543. Gardiner finally relented not on the grounds that he agreed with the content of the homilies, but on the grounds of his obedience to the king, and he was imprisoned as was Bonner in August 1547, when he protested after the royal visitations that implemented the homilies had begun.<sup>242</sup>

The Book of Homilies was placed in churches throughout England, along with a translation of Erasmus' Paraphrases, in accordance not only with Cranmer's original purpose of helping to educate the defective clergy, but also with an aim at facilitating conformity and correct misconceptions about the way of salvation. The twelve homilies did not fully address all the important topics that needed to be covered, and Cranmer hoped to bring out a second edition. This intention was not fulfilled until early in Elizabeth's reign. To call these "homilies" is technically stretching the usual understanding of the subgenre. At the time this book was published a homily was probably to be understood as an informal sermon that amounted to a devotion drawn from a text that was specified to be addressed on a particular Sunday in the ecclesiastical year.<sup>243</sup> Cranmer conceived the homilies to be read, and in the reading to

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<sup>242</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 65-69.

<sup>243</sup> Ronald B. Bond, *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 3-4.

rein in the preacher. They were built around topics rather than expositions of a passage where the text controlled the message, but the homilies identified and expanded upon what Cranmer considered the most important doctrinal issues and so they had a heuristic purpose as well. They indirectly taught the prized hermeneutic of the reformers by citing primary passages germane to the topic at hand, then providing other biblical narrative accounts and didactic texts that clarified the meaning. Thus Scripture was its own best interpreter. The texts were also richly illustrated with support from the related metaphors and the Church Fathers.<sup>244</sup>

One of these homilies was “An Exhortacion Concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,” which used Romans 13 as a primary passage teaching the subject’s non-resistance as essential to the peace and well-being of the realm.<sup>245</sup> It is unknown who actually wrote this homily, though Cranmer himself wrote on obedience later in connection with Kett’s rebellion of 1549. The sermon’s insistence

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>245</sup> Central passages around which expositions are built have been a feature of all the non-resistance proponents. This presents an interesting contrast to the advocates of active resistance, such as Christopher Goodman who will defend his view against this sort of proof-texting.

that the Pope is a subverter of the very biblical doctrine being enjoined in the homily suggests that it was not authored by Gardiner or Bonner.<sup>246</sup>

With Romans 13 as the departure point the author exhorted his audience in the necessity of obedience to all levels of magistracy that are ordained as God's vice-regents, but especially to the king who is the highest minister: "Let us consider the Scriptures of the Holy Ghost, whiche perswade and commaunde us all obediently to be subject: first and chiefly to the Kynges majestie, supreme hed over all, and next to his honorable counsail, and to all other noble men, magistrates and officers, which by Gods goodness be placed and ordered."<sup>247</sup> God has created and arranged all of creation with its beautiful and intricate order, and he has delegated his authority of governance to princes who must be obeyed. These rulers must apply themselves diligently to gain the knowledge and wisdom necessary to carry out their offices, including revising previous understandings of their offices that do not conform to the Scriptures. This is why subjects pray, and step aside from exercising personal vengeance, or even judgment, so that the magistrate to whom the power of the sword has been given, and who indeed

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<sup>246</sup> "An Exhortacion Concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition*, ed. Ronald B. Bond (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 168.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

has been prepared for his role, should be able to exercise his office effectively. All judgment is delegated to the magistrate, so that one is to understand that the declaration in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy that all vengeance belongs to God, who is alone responsible to repay, was delegated to the civil magistrate by God himself. The connection between the vengeance of God and the magistrate was spelled out by St. Paul in Romans 13, and the author of the homily quotes verses one through seven in their entirety.

From Romans 13 the author drew four conclusions that represented a paradigm of non-resistance thought. First, when St. Paul addresses the exhortation to all persons possessing souls, he means that no one, particularly any member of the clergy, is excepted from obedience to the command to obey rulers, which he took to be lay rulers. Second, it is not only temporal punishment at the hands of earthly rulers that is in store for the rebel, but eternal condemnation to all those who demonstrate a characteristic resistance to God's wisdom, order, power, and authority.<sup>248</sup> Third, the author included the idea that St. Paul made no exception in the case of evil rulers. They are to be obeyed as well "not onely for fear, but also for conscience sake," even though he does not explain what the difference between obeying out of fear and from the conscience is, nor if there is any difference between obeying the magistrate in temporal concerns and in spiritual matters. Fourth, as well as subjects no inferior is to resist

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 162-163.



higher powers, meaning that God has ordained the very order of things and not just the power and authority behind that arrangement. It would be inconceivable that the lower magistrate would challenge the higher, since primarily the power of vice-regency was given to the king, thus also monarchy is God's program.<sup>249</sup> The sovereign minister is God's anointed and his ministers are those he in turn appoints. All represent a higher power, thus all must be obeyed.<sup>250</sup>

In Cranmer and Peter Martyr's "Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion," written two years after the Book of Homilies was published, the authors concluded that rebellion arose out of more than ignorance of the order of creation or unfamiliarity with the command to obedience to the lay power. In the case of Kett's rebellion Cranmer and Martyr assert that rebellion arose out of a deep hatred of the gospel of God among many in the realm, even some of those who claim allegiance to the gospel with their words, but not in their hearts.<sup>251</sup> So as Cranmer and other Edwardian advocates of the

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 167. Cranmer had written, "And moreover it is not amply spoken that the inferior rulers should do nothing, but by order of their laws: for the laws be not theirs, but the princes, instead of whom they do minister the same justice, that he would do himself by the commonorder of his laws, if it should happen him to take the judgment thereof in his own hands." Thomas Cranmer, "Corrections of the *Institution of a Christian Man*, by Henry VIII with Archbishop Cranmer's Annotations," Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 105.

Reformation would learn the hard way after the apparently premature death of Edward VI, there are sometimes greater forces behind the kinds of changes advocated in sermons, than making sure that the sermon itself is heard. If reformers such as Cranmer trusted the biblical observation that “the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord,” they would eventually have to hope that he would turn the heart of a monarch who wanted to restore the primacy of Rome.

### **Conclusion**

During the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the growth of Protestantism among the English people was aided by royal administrations that craved the obedience of its people. In an increasingly favorable climate for reform, exegetes tended to stress the obligation for every person to obey the civil authorities by adopting an attitude of non-resistance with Romans 13:1-7 representing the central biblical text that showcased the Christian’s obligation to obey even an evil ruler. The homily, “An Exhortacion Concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,” emphasized the importance of a subject’s non-resistance to the ruler for the proper functioning of English society, and used Romans 13 as its central passage. The exegetical approaches to the text during this period did not continue the historical

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<sup>251</sup> Thomas Cranmer, “Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion,” Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 197.

approach of Colet, and expositions moved quickly from a plain reading of the text to its application to significant issues of contemporary life. These early Protestant interpreters particularly sought to demonstrate that even the church prelates owed obedience to the temporal rulers, though those members of the clergy were excluded from the magistracy themselves.

Romans 13 featured prominently in William Tyndale's Obedience and he believed the commands to obey the higher authorities were rooted in St. Paul's opposition to Christian revenge, a warning against taking the law into one's own hands. Indeed, the desire to take one's own revenge is rebellion against God's order, which cannot be changed. To resist it is to oppose nature. It is ironic that though Tyndale was considered an outlaw by his own country, he may be credited with advocating a strong monarchy in England, encouraging the Crown to stand up to the prelates who did not take the authority of the king seriously. Tyndale's confidence in God's appointment of the ruler is so complete his only criticism of the civil authorities is that they are not "manful" in allowing the papacy to manipulate them, even to the point of warring against other Christians.

Edward Fox demonstrated similar concerns to that of Tyndale, carefully articulating the differences between the authority of the clergy and that of the laity, and warning the clergy to stay out of temporal affairs. Fox's exegesis of the biblical text is based on a straightforward reading of Romans 13 from the Latin translation. He does

not appeal to juxtaposition with verses in chapter 12 as Colet and Tyndale did, but uses analogy of faith to show the preponderance of passages supporting the principle that all Christians, including the members of the clergy are obligated to obey the civil authorities.

Edwardian bishop John Hooper also emphasized the need to obey minor magistrates as the representatives of the king, and distinguished between the magistrates as public persons, and those who are obligated to obey them as private persons. Hooper also had in mind the spirituality when he saw the similarities between St. Paul's day and the sixteenth century. Hooper saw in both eras that the prelacy is responsible for rebellion and sedition. Active disobedience even to wicked rulers and minors who ascend to rule is never permitted as the apostle testifies to in Romans 13, and indeed the presence of these public persons enables private persons to live their lives in peace.

## CHAPTER 3 - The Resistance Approach of Marian Exegetes

### Introduction

English Protestant intellectuals who fled to the Continent following the accession of Mary Tudor in 1553 descended unaware into an agonizing crucible that stretched the limits of their applied theology. Among the most important of the results of the refining process that took place in the English exilic community were expositions of Romans 13 crafted by resistance theorists who provided an authoritative starting-point for the eventual rejection of absolutism in England. The simple, yet creative, exegesis by three former Edwardian clergymen would contribute a theoretical basis for some of the most important political literature of sixteenth-century Europe. John Ponet's understanding of Romans 13 repositioned the locus of divine ordination from the magistrate to God's law and thus permitted an alternative for Christians to alter their political structures and leaders at will, while Christopher Goodman and John Knox contributed a theory of the accountability of the Elect. They emphasized that it is ultimately the responsibility of every Christian to act for the corporate good and accept responsibility not only for the election of lawful rulers, but also for insuring the eventual triumph of divine laws that bring about positive corporate health and welfare in society. Each of the three in his own way experienced so much trouble in his

personal and public life that he could not anticipate the response to neither his distracted thinking nor his brilliant claims for biblical authority. Ponet suffered from disillusionment, Goodman from regrets surrounding being thrust into the arena of criticism and joining Knox in his ill-advised attack upon women rulers, and Knox for his impetuosity in defending what he held to be true. Though each of them earned notoriety for being the very embodiment of political and religious fanaticism that conservative Elizabethans feared, few could doubt their creative and lasting contributions to resistance theory.

### **John Ponet: God's Laws are the Higher Powers**

At the same time Thomas Cranmer ordered John Hooper to preach Lenten sermons before the young King Edward VI in 1550, he also ordered John Ponet to preach before the king and council.<sup>252</sup> The careers of the two John's provide an ironic contrast. Ponet was a supporter of the Duke of Somerset, and Hooper had Somerset as his patron. At Easter, Hooper was offered the bishopric of Gloucester and Ponet was appointed to the bishopric of Rochester. Ponet accepted his post and was consecrated on June 26, 1550, while Hooper refused to accept the king's appointment based on scruples that, though admirable for their incipient nonconformity, were not shared by

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<sup>252</sup> John Hooper to Heinrich Bullinger, 29 June 1550, Original Letters, I:87.

many reformers.<sup>253</sup> Cranmer would use the opportunity to make an example of Hooper to all those who would hope to appeal to private conscience to resist civil authority. Hooper became an example for his resistance and would go on to be called the “Father of Nonconformity,”<sup>254</sup> and yet would advocate a fairly traditional model of obedience to the magistrate, while Ponet, who quietly accepted his post, would go on to propose the most radical apology for active rebellion printed in the English language up until that time. Hooper put his theories of non-resistance to the test and was burned at the stake. Ponet first joined in Wyatt’s Rebellion against the succession to Edward VI, then fled to Strassburg and died in poverty before his views on resistance to tyranny could be published. The watershed of English history that put both of their theories to the test was the accession of Mary Tudor to the throne.

The contrast to Hooper is ironic, but it is usual to lump the name of John Ponet together with the names of Christopher Goodman and John Knox, as if they were a Calvinist Marian exilic trio of bitter and angry radicals who hated women, especially those that ruled, and proposed tyrannicide to inspire violence against Mary Tudor. The truth is that though Ponet did choose exile just as Knox and Goodman had, there is no evidence of contact between Ponet and the other two. Ponet spent his exile in poverty,

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<sup>253</sup> John Hooper to Heinrich Bullinger, 7 November 1549, Original Letters, I:69.

<sup>254</sup> A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation, 2d ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 255. Originally published in 1964.

returning to his classical studies in Strassburg while Goodman and Knox were stirring controversy over the Edwardian prayer book, first at Frankfurt and later at Geneva. Goodman and Knox left no doubt that they were Calvinists. Ponet was something else, probably very much like Cranmer, a Lutheran who supported a moderate reform, a proto-Anglican who might have been in the forefront of the Elizabethan Settlement, had he lived. All three of the exiles came to the conclusion that resistance to and rebellion against ungodly rulers was not only possible but mandatory for the Christian, but Ponet had reasons for his theory of resistance that were very different from that of Goodman and Knox, and Ponet's theory was published first, two years before Goodman.

### **John Ponet's Exposition of Romans 13**

The date of John Ponet's birth is uncertain, perhaps it took place in 1514 in Lincolnshire. He was trained as a classical scholar at Queen's College, Cambridge, during the halcyon days of Greek study there. Cambridge also produced other great scholars such as Thomas Smith and John Cheke—who established the classic pronunciation of Greek—as well as William Cecil, Nicholas Ridley, John Bradford, and even Stephen Gardiner.<sup>255</sup> Ponet received the Bachelor of Arts in 1533 and the Master of Arts in 1535. He then pursued the life of the scholar-priest beginning in 1536, and little is known of his activities until he became the chaplain to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer

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<sup>255</sup> J. D. Mackie, *The Earlier Tudors 1485-1558* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 571.



in 1545. Ponet was married in 1548 to a woman who, unbeknownst to him, was already married to a Nottingham butcher. Ponet, who wrote A Defence of Marriage in 1549, had become married before the ban on clerical marriage had been lifted by law. However, his marriage was unlawful anyway and had to be set aside in the summer of 1551 when his power and wealth—Ponet was now a bishop—was at its height. Ponet has been vilified, even as late as the twentieth century, for what some have interpreted as an obsession with sex in his writings on clerical marriage, admitting personal struggles in relatively graphic detail. Even in Short Treatise he attacks Marian bishops such as Bonner and Gardiner for their sexual indiscretions. The fact that he only remained unmarried for three months after his first marriage was set aside is cited as evidence of his hot blood. On October 25, 1551, he married Maria, daughter of another of Cranmer's employees. A modern author is probably correct when he says that what constituted a perplexing matter of conscience to a former priest in sixteenth-century England was to those of "a later era nothing more than the normal behavior of a heterosexual male."<sup>256</sup>

As Bishop of Westminster, replacing Stephen Gardiner, and therefore fourth in the ranking of English bishops, Ponet was actively involved with parliament throughout 1553, the year of the death of Edward VI. He apparently agreed with

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<sup>256</sup> Barrett F. Beer, "John Ponet's *Short Treatise of Politicke Power* Reassessed," Sixteenth Century Journal XXI, no. 3 (1990): 375.

Cranmer and Warwick that altering the succession was the only way to preserve the reforms that had been enacted since 1547.<sup>257</sup> Nevertheless, he did not immediately flee after the accession of Mary, although a fellow bishop Ponet only refers to as “the ape” urged him to “play the wise man” in conforming to the new regime.<sup>258</sup> Soon Ponet was deprived of his office in Winchester and disappeared from public view only to resurface as a participant in Sir Thomas Wyatt’s rebellion in January 1554. Apparently, he abandoned Wyatt shortly before the latter’s advance on London and fled to the Continent.<sup>259</sup>

In Strassburg he lived with Maria and returned to his classical studies without shirking the occasional debate. He was encouraged in his studies by the company of his

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<sup>257</sup> Beer, 376.

<sup>258</sup> John Ponet, *A Short Treatise of Politicke Power, and of the True Obedience which Subjectes Owe to Kings and Other Ciuile Gouvernours, with an Exhortacion to All True Naturall Englishe Men*, Compyled by D. I. P. B. R. W (Strassburg: 1546; reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm Ltd., 1972), L vi verso. Ponet said the bishop showed a lack of conviction he thought typified the prelates who were loyal to Mary: “I have knowne thee for a long time, to be a good felow. I warrant thee, thou shalt recover thy losse and live in honor, if thou wilt be ruled by reason. And with that he lept up to clappe me on the sholder, for unless he stode on tiptoe, he could not reache it. Tush, (saied he) thou art a fool: If the Turke ruled in England, I would frame mi self to live according.”

<sup>259</sup> John Stowe, *The Annales of England : Faithfully Collected Out of the Most Autenticall Authors, Records, and Other Monuments of Antiquitie, Lately Collected, Since Encreased and Continued from the First Habitation Yntill This Present Year 1605* (London: George Bishop and Thomas Adams, 1605), 1048.

friend, John Cheke, before the latter was kidnapped and carried back to England.<sup>260</sup>

Two of his last letters to Heinrich Bullinger discuss his request to obtain a passage in Greek from St. Ignatius' Letter to the Philadelphians then being prepared for publication at Zurich. He wished to use the passage to refute the contention of the Catholic Thomas Martin that St. Paul was not married. When Bullinger complied with his request by having the learned editor, Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) send the transcript in hand-written form, Ponet was so overwhelmed with the gift and the one who gave it that he considered the very paper that the great Gessner had written upon to be among his greatest treasures.<sup>261</sup> Within two months Ponet was dead, having left Maria penniless. In a heart-rending letter to Peter Martyr, Maria apologizes for having accidentally sold some of Martyr's books that were among her husband's. After failing to recover the lost volumes she purchased new copies for him out of the proceeds of the sale.<sup>262</sup> Ponet's greatest work, A Short Treatise of Politicke Power, was published in August 1556, the same month in which he died. The identity of the author was disputed perhaps due to the cryptic assignation of "D. I. P. B. R. W"<sup>263</sup> in place of the

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<sup>260</sup> John Ponet to Heinrich Bullinger, June 1556, Original Letters, I:117.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Maria Ponet to Peter Martyr, 15 July 1557, Original Letters, I:118.

<sup>263</sup> Doctor John Ponet Bishop Rochester Winchester.

author's name. Ponet spent his last days in despair because he felt betrayed by former English colleagues who were entrusted with preserving the reformed gains under Edward VI. He warned of divine retribution for those, like Stephen Gardiner, who would deliver the realm back into the Romish camp for personal gain. He died before seeing his published political theories tested against Mary, and could not have anticipated his theories passing into obscurity for almost a century because of the accession of Elizabeth I in November, 1558.<sup>264</sup>

Throughout his treatise on political power, Ponet alludes to the issue of obedience that is raised by philological considerations within Romans 13. Ponet evidences his excellent command of the Greek of the passage in question without detailing the grammatical considerations to his readership. This is evidence of the awareness of his intended audience, which is perhaps, as Barrett Beer suggests, English exiles looking for practical alternatives in responding to the accession of Mary Tudor.<sup>265</sup> The unique contribution of his interpretation of Romans 13 has to do with the identification of the higher powers and what it means that God has ordained them. All

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<sup>264</sup> David H. Wollman, "The Biblical Justification for Resistance to Authority in Ponet's and Goodman's Polemics," Sixteenth Century Journal XIII, no. 4 (1982): 32. A Short Treatise was republished in 1639 and 1642.

<sup>265</sup> Beer, 377.

Ponet's arguments flow of necessity from his identification of the phrase, present in verse one, *eksousias huperechousais*.<sup>266</sup> Ponet seemed to be dealing with the apparent contradiction between Paul's injunction to obey the higher powers and Peter and John's declaration, recorded in Acts 5:27-29 that the servant of God is to obey God rather than the men who possess civil authority. He solves the apparent disjunction by claiming that there is no contradiction and bases his assertion upon the philological assessment of Romans 13:1. In doing so, he became the first author writing in the English language to turn a passage, which, interpreted in its plain sense, is traditionally hostile to proponents of active disobedience to a crucial supporting text for resistance to tyranny.<sup>267</sup> Ponet contends that St. Paul is calling for Christians' submission to the power and authority behind the office of the magistrate, and not for subjection to the magistrate himself, however evil he may or may not be. God is the true source of political power, says Ponet, and it is to him that subjects are ultimately accountable. Thus one is always called to obey God rather than men and magistrates may either be the ministers of his law, or they can be the subverters of justice. If they subvert justice

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<sup>266</sup> Ponet correctly takes the plural datives as direct objects used with an imperative verb that implies a personal relation, "be subject." See Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 78-79. Though personal relation is in the range of meaning, lexicographers permit the possibility that *eksousia* can either refer to a person, such as a magistrate (or less probably an angelic being) or to an impersonal power such as an ordinance given by God. Ponet takes the phrase in this latter sense, thus referring to the higher power as "it" throughout his discussion of the passage. The distinction is the linchpin to his entire argument.

<sup>267</sup> Wollman, 38.

they must be disobeyed. According to Ponet, St. Paul is declaring in this text that God has ordained that evil be taken away. When rulers as God's ministers execute their offices properly by defending the good and punishing the evil it is sinful to not obey them. The sword of Romans 13:4 is given to excise evil.<sup>268</sup>

Ponet tells his readers that it is the power, or authority, behind the officers that is ordained by God. This appointed power gave men the authority to make additional laws, some of which were bound to create discord, such as those that had to do with disputes about property. This ordination also showed lawmakers how to draft good laws that are indifferent and how to distinguish which punishments are appropriate to the offense, those that are neither too harsh nor too lenient. Out of this ordinance flows the need for magistrates who are instruments to personally execute the laws "for lawes without execucion, be no more profitable, than belles without clappers."<sup>269</sup>

Nevertheless, it is a matter indifferent as to what form of government the commonwealth selects. Nothing requires that they choose monarchy. Ponet sows early the seeds that question the necessity of English monarchy, and places the power to determine what form of government, and thus who serves at its head, in the hands of the commonwealth. Even if Mary had as much right to be queen of England as her father was king, Ponet argues, she does not have the right to do whatever she pleases,

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<sup>268</sup> Ponet, D ii verso.

<sup>269</sup> Ponet, A iv verso.

because she serves with an oath, for example, that she will not diminish any of the lands of the realm. And if she does so (as when she lost Calais), her subjects have the right to depose her because she has violated her oath.<sup>270</sup>

Ponet pointed out that there are some who took the word “soul” in Romans 13:1 to mean the soul as a man, not a life of material and immaterial together, but only of the flesh. Thus St. Paul is taken to be speaking only to fleshly or worldly people as in layman or temporal (as opposed to spiritual) man, and saying they are to be subject to the ruling powers.<sup>271</sup> He speculates that the pope (whom he calls Antichrist) interprets the word *psuche* this way so that he can have the clergy as his subjects. However, Ponet offers a word study to show that soul usually means every kind of person as it did when it was used in the Genesis accounts of Noah and Jacob. He also quotes St. Chrysostom’s gloss on the passage to say that all people, whether lay or spiritual are in view in the apostle’s exhortation.<sup>272</sup> Ponet differs from previous authors in not only demonstrating that clergy are to be obedient as much as lay people, but also that kings, princes, and all governors are included as “every soul.” If this is so, then this command was for magistrates as much as it was for their subjects.

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<sup>270</sup> Ponet, E iii verso.

<sup>271</sup> Ponet, C iiiii verso.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., C v recto.

Ponet was not simply arguing from the passage that magistrates have an implied duty to promote the good, but that magistrates are to submit themselves to the power, or authority, behind their position. In this way the Romans 13 text was truly for everyone: subjects and rulers alike were to submit to the higher power which is the ordinance of God. Subjects were to obey the magistrate when he truly was in alignment with God's law. That the magistrate may be personally evil is irrelevant if he enforced God's laws and made indifferent laws that assisted in creating a framework for God's laws to function properly, and that do not stand as statutes that contradict God's laws nor contradict the appropriate goals God has given for just rule. Magistrates likewise were to submit to the higher powers by not thinking themselves so important that they falsely held themselves above God's laws nor that they believed they can create laws that are at odds with the divine program. In addition, Ponet pointed out that that the exhortation is for every kind of magistrate position, not just kings and princes, but all kinds of minor governmental officials that serve under kings, because all of these shared the same general object: to maintain justice in the commonwealth. For Ponet the higher power was represented by any official that administered justice: "be he kaisar, king, mayre, sherif, constable, horsholder, or neuer so low: and some wolde haue it to be interpreted only of kinges and chiefest officers. But it is here to be taken for the ministerie and autoritie, that all officers of justice doo execute."<sup>273</sup> Further, since God is

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., C v recto-C v verso.



the power behind all kinds of authority, could one also assume that kings and princes were to be included as “every soul” that is to obey the just laws? Because if they were not subject to the laws and did not have to obey them, would that not mean that God had ordained robbers and tyrants, and thus make God the author of sin? Ponet argued that these laws, being given by God, were good and it would be against natural law to exempt the minister charged with executing the law from the law itself because, “it is also a principle of all lawes grounded on the lawe of nature, that euery man should use (them) him self and be obedient to that lawe, that he will others be bounden unto.”<sup>274</sup> Further still, when disobedience to tyrants is necessary, it is to be active. Here Ponet interweaves reason with biblical argumentation.<sup>275</sup> God has delivered to the commonwealth the ability to make laws. It is by these laws that they have established methods of ruling themselves. To whomever they delegate the power to create laws, it is only the creative power to set up indifferent laws, which are laws that help create a framework for carrying out the laws of God in a reasonable order. God’s laws were prior even to the establishment of political power, which Ponet held, as Luther before him, to be necessitated by the fallen state of humanity.

Ponet also argued that God has not given the magistrate power over the soul and conscience of a man, but over his body and within the temporal sphere. Ponet rejects

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., C vi verso.

<sup>275</sup> Wollman, 36.

the Anabaptist view of human government because he says that men are incapable of ruling themselves, yet he also holds that the power and authority of God were transferred, after the fall, to the commonwealth. Some have seen a dissatisfying contradiction in this.<sup>276</sup> However, Ponet's remarks about Anabaptism have been taken out of context. He criticized the view that he puts in the mouths of Anabaptists that political power is unnecessary because people can live without sin. It is in this context, Ponet said, that as soon as sin entered the world it became impossible for men to rule themselves by themselves. In this sense, the misery of the presence of sin is so great that man "is no more hable to rule himself by him self, than one beast is hable to rule another: and that therefore God ordained ciuile power (his minister) to rule him."<sup>277</sup> So, if commonwealths create their own method of government, they have the right to change that method when the appointed head does not pursue his proper ends, that is, maintenance of justice, defense of the innocent, and punishment of evil. Since the ordinance is the excision of evil through use of the sword, "if the ministers of the ciuile power commaunde thee to dishonour God, to committe idolatry, to kill an innocent, to fight against thy countrey, to give or lend that thou hast, to such as mynd the subversion and destruction of thy countrey, or to maintain them in their wickednesse,

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<sup>276</sup> Beer, 382-383.

<sup>277</sup> Ponet, C viii verso.

you ought not to doo it, but to leave it undone: for it is euil, and God (the Supreme and Highest Power) will not that thou shouldest do it.”<sup>278</sup>

If commonwealths have the right to change their head, they can also execute them. Princes are people under law just like everyone else. And if the magistrates are subject to the law, then God can raise up other ministers who bear the sword for the punishment of magistrates. No positive laws need to be created to deal with bad rulers, they are subject to the same laws as everyone else. If they commit murder, they have no right to do it no matter how absolute they imagine their power to be, and they can be tried and executed for it.

Formed in the crucible of exile, and in the midst of disappointments following the accession of Mary and the restoration of Catholicism in England between 1553 and 1558, Ponet’s views about Romans 13 are foundational to his political theory, based on philological considerations in the text, and offer a turning point in the history of resistance theories in the English experience. Ponet held that the traditional, plain interpretation of Romans 13 that called for non-resistance fails to recognize that magistrates are instruments of God to do the good for which God has ordained the principle of political power. According to Ponet, St. Paul has said that the function of these human instruments is to remove evil, and if they subvert this godly purpose, they, also being subject to the same God-ordained laws, must be excised themselves. Rulers

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<sup>278</sup> Ponet, *D iv recto*.

serve at the behest of the community, which can vary the way they choose to be governed without altering the authority that God has ordained, that which is higher than all magistrates. The higher powers are ultimately identified not as human instruments, but as the power which God administered by, and to, the community through magistrates ordered according to reason. The extent of the command to submission to God's laws is absolute, and sometimes leads individuals to disobey evil magistrates who attempt to control their souls and consciences rather than their bodies in the temporal realm. Thus, Ponet argued, there is no real limitation on St. Paul's command to obey the higher power. In this interpretation, Ponet appealed to both reason and revelation. For him, this understanding of Romans provided consistency both to understanding biblical texts concerning the believers' relationship to the governing powers, and to living in any kind of commonwealth. Ponet contended that there was no disagreement between St. Paul and St. Peter: "We must obey God rather than men."

### **The Geneva Pamphleteers and Romans 13**

Eight hundred English people immigrated to the continent rather than endure the heresy laws Mary established after her accession. Most found their way to centers of the Reformed Church in western Germany and Switzerland. At Frankfurt, John Knox and William Whittingham (1524-1579) presided over an English congregation that

employed the 1552 Second Book of Common Prayer in worship without the Litany and other elements the leaders deemed to be impurities that smacked of popery. It did not help matters that John Calvin had written Knox with criticisms of the Anglican liturgy. Among later arrivals who escaped from England to Frankfurt were those like Richard Cox (1500-1581), who supported the Litany portion of the prayer book. This led to a conflict between Cox and Knox, of which Cox gained the upper hand by notifying Frankfurt magistrates of Knox's incendiary rhetoric concerning the Emperor. Knox was expelled and sent packing.<sup>279</sup>

The next stop for Knox and his followers was Geneva, where over 200 of the Marian exiles were welcomed by Calvin. Christopher Goodman and Anthony Gilby were pastors of the English congregation beginning in 1555. The prayer book was not an issue in Geneva, and the English congregation developed a book of discipline called Form of Prayers that employed a Calvinistic understanding of ecclesiology and worship. Other ideas regarding the relationship of the magistrate to the church influenced the English congregation. The magistrate's duty was to promote godliness, excise heresy and idolatry, and protect the church. They may also have been strongly influenced by Calvin's view that God is the effective sovereign of the state.

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<sup>279</sup> Leo F. Solt, Church and State in Early Modern England 1509-1640 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 63-64; John Calvin to the English at Frankfort, 13 January 1555, Letters of John Calvin (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 163-165; Jasper Ridley, John Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 208-210.

Nevertheless, the combination of gifted English expatriates and the heady theological atmosphere that caused Knox to call Geneva “that perfect school of Christ,” combined to produce a political philosophy that proved far more radical than Calvin, and indeed went far beyond his doctrine of non-resistance. Their doctrine, as well as their political theories would find their way into the marginalia of the highly influential Geneva Bible. The literature produced by these radical thinkers in an extraordinary confluence of original and disturbing political thought caused its authors to be referred to as the “Geneva Pamphleteers.”<sup>280</sup>

### **Christopher Goodman: Mouthpiece of the Blasting Trumpet?**

Christopher Goodman (1520-1603) attended Brasenose College, Oxford, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in 1541 and a Master of Arts in 1544. He became the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford in 1548. After the accession of Mary, he fled to the Continent and lodged at Strassburg with Peter Martyr by December, 1554. During the prayer book controversy at Frankfurt he sided with Knox and accompanied William Whittingham to Geneva, arriving in October of 1555. In the course of his pastoral duties over the next few years he preached a sermon on Acts 5 on the narrative of St. Peter and

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<sup>280</sup> Solt, 64-65; J. W. Allen, History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London: University Paperbacks, 1961), 65; Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, Theology of Law and Authority in the English Reformation (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 95-96.

St. John, and continued to preach the Gospel despite being commanded by the religious authorities to desist. The apostles' declaration, "We must obey God, rather than men," became the central text of a message that must have intrigued Goodman's first listeners. According to Whittingham, he was urged to expand on the themes introduced in the sermon, and the original thoughts became the kernel of his book, How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyd of Their Subjects. Though it excited his original audience of exiles, the publication of the book caused no end of trouble to Goodman, initially perhaps preventing him from returning to his native land after the death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth in 1558. The radical theories about resistance to authorities that Goodman espoused in the book, were troubling enough to conservative magistrates, but the fact that he subscribed, in the book, to theories about the deficiencies of female rulership similar to the ones Knox made odious in The First Blast of the Trumpet, did not help him in his attempt to become reestablished in Elizabethan England. Still longing to return to England, he decided to join Knox in Scotland in September 1559 and soon became a pastor at Ayr. It was he who informed Calvin of the death of Knox's wife Margery in February, 1661. He finally returned to England in 1565 as the chaplain to Sir Henry Sidney. In 1571 he was called before the Ecclesiastical Commission, which was attempting to sniff out nonconformity. The commissioners produced a copy of the book and interrogated Goodman. It was in this venue that Goodman retracted a number of his previous opinions. During the course of a series of these retractions,

Goodman confessed to the commissioners that he now wished his most famous book had never been written.<sup>281</sup>

But the book was written, and Goodman has often been considered the mouthpiece for John Knox's theory of resistance, as arguments almost identical to Goodman's were voiced both in Knox's Appellation to the Nobility and Estates and his remarks at "The Debate at the General Assembly, June 1564." It may be worth noting the obvious, that both of Knox's public statements about the epistolary basis of resistance were published after the release of Goodman's book. Still, there is a good case for seeing Knox as the influencer because there is evidence that he was thinking about resistance theories before Goodman preached his fateful sermon on Acts 5. Knox had begun to formulate his resistance theories at least by the time of his famous interview with Calvin in Geneva in March 1554. At this time he fired four questions at the Geneva reformer and had the same questions for Heinrich Bullinger, the lead pastor at Zurich. The first question was whether a king who inherited his father's throne as a minor was to be obeyed as a lawful magistrate while still a minor. The question seemed to be a retrospective on Edward VI. The second question was, could a woman ruler who married transfer her rights to her husband? This was an obvious question about

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<sup>281</sup> William Salkyns to Heinrich Bullinger, 29 December 1554, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation, Written During the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: Chiefly from the Archives of Zurich*, trans. and ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), I: 347; Christopher Goodman to John Calvin, 13 February 1561, *Letters of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 238; Dan G. Danner, "Christopher Goodman and the English Protestant Tradition of Civil Disobedience," *Sixteenth Century Journal* VIII, no. 3 (1977): 61-65.



Mary and her marriage to Philip II of Spain. Third, was obedience required to a magistrate who enforced idolatry? And last, was it lawful for Christians to support nobility who were resisting an idolatrous ruler? Apparently Knox was not satisfied with the answers given him by Calvin, but was more encouraged by the ambiguous responses of Bullinger.<sup>282</sup>

Knox had left England, never to return in a leadership capacity, and as sworn enemy of female rule was certainly not about to be welcomed. Nevertheless, he would go on to apply his understanding of the Calvinistic ideal of the state as theocracy with the powerful additive of the obligation of people and nobility to choose rulers, using force if necessary, who will promote the wealth of their people, protect the community of believers, be prepared to reform abuses in the church and root out idolatry.

According to Knox, if magistrates dragged their feet in bringing about the needed societal changes, or if they promoted idolatry and deprived people of the nourishment of the Word of God, then those who were governed themselves were obligated to depose the rule, and rebellion was a duty.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 110-111. Danner, 67.

<sup>283</sup> Allen, 107-113; John Knox, "The Apellation to the Nobility and Estates," *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 84, 87, 104; John Knox, "The Debate at the General Assembly, June 1564," *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 191.

Goodman's taxis of resistance was similar to that of Knox. Like Knox he held to the absolute authority of the law of God that ought always to be obeyed, and defined the duties of a Christian toward the magistrates. Goodman held that God charged nobles with defending godly religion, laws, and the wealth of their country. As in Israel, kings were elective, based on recognition of people in the community. The people of the country were charged with choosing godly rulers and the nobility and lesser magistrates were responsible to lead those people in resistance against princes who abuse the power God has given them. This was a major departure from the assumption of those who held the non-resistance view that election of rulers was from God alone.<sup>284</sup> Godly kings were to be revered and obeyed, and not to obey is sin. However, if princes fail to protect and promote true religion, and instead promote idolatry they must be punished. If the nobility or minor magistrates will not bear the sword against the ungodly ruler, then the people they rule must bear the sword. Goodman says if it happens that the ruled must punish the ruler, God will be at their head.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Thomas Cranmer, "The Archbishop's Speech at the Coronation of Edward VI, February 20, 1547," *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 126. Cranmer says, of rulers, "For they be God's anointed, not in respect of the oil which the bishop useth, but in consideration of their power which is ordained, of the sword which is authorized, of their persons which are elected by God, and endued with the gifts of his Spirit for the better ruling and guiding of his people."

Though the kernel of Goodman's book is Acts 5, he says that his thesis cannot succeed unless he can answer the objections of an imaginary opponent who puts forth the traditional non-resistance interpretation of Romans 13. The opponent establishes the argument that no one ought to disobey the ruler, without exceptions, and this view is supported by Romans 13:1. As if St. Paul's authority was not enough reason to obey, the apostle puts forth two reasons to support the exhortation: First, resisting powers is resisting God himself who ordained those powers. Second, those who transgress this exhortation will be punished. The objector's conclusion is that one should obey based on Pauline authority and sensible reasons.<sup>286</sup>

Goodman enters the diatribe with a surprising hermeneutical gambit. He counters that a plain reading of the passage is not acceptable and that one must understand the historical context of the Romans to grasp why Paul would say something on the face of which seems so contradictory to practices of godly people of the Old Testament and the other apostles. Goodman assesses the historical context of Rome in a similar way to John Colet. He argues that there were Christians at Rome who, like the contemporary Anabaptists and Libertines, thought that the office of magistrate was unnecessary for a believer. These people wanted to use the excuse of

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<sup>285</sup> O'Donovan, 106-107; Goodman, 35, 47-49, 185; Allen, 116-117.

<sup>286</sup> Goodman, 103-105.

their Christian Liberty to escape paying the tributes and customs under which they chafed. Goodman said this was also a constant concern in the Jewish community of Jesus' day. In Matthew 22:17 and its synoptic parallels, the religious leaders come to ask Jesus if it was lawful for Jews to pay tribute to Caesar. Even in Acts 5: 34-37, Rabbi Gamaliel mentions Judas Galilaeus, who caused trouble by saying that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Rome. With these kinds of pressures, Goodman said Paul felt it necessary to exhort them to esteem the office of magistrate and pay him his due. The problem with this historical approach is that Goodman provided no plausible link between the passages drawn from New Testament narratives and the situation in the Roman church to which Paul writes. Goodman then seemed to abandon the historical line of attack and find evidence in some philological aspects of the text.<sup>287</sup> What Goodman found is an implicit description of legitimate authority. Legitimate authority is lawful, according to God's law. It may be recognized in a ruler who takes seriously the expectations of the one who appointed him to protect the good and punish evil. Christians are only obligated to obey lawful authority, and are not rebels when they refuse to obey the unlawful commands of illegitimate rulers.

He finds his clue in the first verse: "there is no power but of God." Goodman says that St. Paul means there is no power that is not orderly and lawfully instituted by God. One is bound to obey magistrates whom God has ordained lawfully according to

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 105-107.

his Word. When Goodman uses the term “lawfully” he means according to God’s law, revealed and natural, and thus draws the reader back to the Old Testament theocratic ideal.

Another characteristic of magistrates whom one is obligated to obey is that they recognize their divine stewardship and rule in godly fear of God, him who appointed them. Goodman argues that if the magistrate in view in the Romans’ situation had not been a lawful ruler, then St. Paul would be saying that God approved of tyranny and oppression as dispensed by ungodly rulers. God never ordained laws that approved of idolatry, but rather that reprobated all kinds of oppressors, tyrants, idolaters, and papists. If a magistrate is any of these, he cannot have been ordained of God. Further, if one disobeys such unlawful rulers, one does not resist the ordinance of God, but of Satan. Goodman said that the Christian is clearly told to resist the devil according to St. James.<sup>288</sup> Every person must be obedient to legitimate authority, but no obedience is required by God to unlawful authority.<sup>289</sup>

Goodman also explains why St. Paul says the legitimate magistrate possesses the sword: Because godly rulers take their office seriously with its charge to defend the

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 109.

good and punish evil, they have been entrusted with the power to make judgments about punishing, even to the point of taking the life of the offender. The godly magistrate has the power of the sword to strike fear into the hearts of evildoers. Thus in Romans 13:3-4 when the apostle tells his readers that if they do well they have no need to fear, he is telling them implicitly what kind of magistrate Paul assumes their ruler to be: a legitimate authority with a healthy fear of accountability to the one who appointed him.

Further, St. Paul continues his assumption that they would obey only legitimate magistrates in the discussion in 13:5, where he writes that God wants the subject's obedience to be for the sake of conscience and not simply out of a fear of being punished. To Goodman, it is far-fetched to imagine that a Christian would attempt to justify contempt for a God-ordained ruler. Instead, the Christian subject will be reminded by conscience that legitimate rulers are a commodity for preservation of the good by suppressing evil and promoting godliness. Conscience directs toward obedience to and reverence for God's ordained ruler who is also rightly owed tribute. It may appear that Goodman meant that the rulers who embody these godly virtues must be Christians themselves, but he said that this is not the case. According to Goodman, St. Paul is not suggesting Christian rulers, unlikely in any case in the background of the epistle to the Romans. What St. Paul does not have in mind in calling the Christian to obedience in Romans 13 is the ungodly ruler who exercises ungodly commandments:

persons whose wickedness overflows so that it is demonstrated in a direction against God. A magistrate may be reprobate, but so long as he outwardly observes God's law and insists on his subjects' doing the same, every Christian must obey.<sup>290</sup>

### **John Knox: Taking Up the Dropped Sword**

Knox's most extensive statement on the meaning and applicability of Romans 13 is in his Appellations to the Nobility and Commonality of Scotland, which he published in Geneva in 1558. After leaving Frankfurt, and before becoming a pastor to English exiles at Geneva, Knox had returned briefly to England to marry in the winter of 1555-1556, and, as a newly married man, ventured into Scotland for the purpose of encouraging Protestants. Scottish bishops were so alarmed that Knox was at large that they accused him of heresy and called him to Edinburgh to face charges before the Archbishop of St. Andrews and a special commission. Knox agreed to appear, but Mary of Guise, the Queen Regent, ordered the bishops to desist proceedings against Knox, perhaps on the basis that she feared the outbreak of violence.<sup>291</sup> Sensing lingering danger, Knox left Scotland for Geneva in July 1556. After his departure, the bishops

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 109-110; 115; 119-120.

<sup>291</sup> Ridley, John Knox, 231-232.

renewed their charges of heresy against Knox and burned him in effigy.<sup>292</sup> It was to the accusations against him in the charges of heresy that Knox wrote his Appellation, addressed not to the bishops of Scotland, but to the Scottish nobility.

The fact that this tract was aimed at the nobility is significant and Knox's philological approach to Romans 13 is crucial to understanding the thesis of this, his most important political tract. Knox argues that because the "powers" to which the people of a country are subject are expressed as a plural, there are varying levels of magistrates which God has ordained and given the power of the sword.<sup>293</sup> In Scotland, it is the nobility of the country that have this power of the sword and they are to take seriously their responsibility to reform religion. Knox defended this Erastianism easily by Old Testament examples. Aaron, the high priest, was clearly subject to Moses' temporal authority as recounted in the Pentateuch. Early in the tract, Knox justifies his call to the nobility to avenge the unjust sentence laid upon him by the bishops as analogous to Old Testament examples, such as Deuteronomy 17, in which civil

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<sup>292</sup> Roger A. Mason, "Introduction," On Rebellion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xiv.

<sup>293</sup> John Knox, "The Appellation of John Knox from the Cruel and Most Unjust Sentence Pronounced Against Him by the False Bishops and Clergy of Scotland, with His Supplication and Exhortation to the Nobility, Estates and Commonalty of the Same Realm," On Rebellion, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 72, 84-85.



magistrates were called upon to stay the fury of the religious authorities.<sup>294</sup> The lower magistrates were expected to carry out control of the clergy, even if their superiors failed to execute their duty. As protection of the innocent was a function ignored by the ungodly Catholic prince, it was a duty prescribed by God for godly Protestant magistrates to protect an innocent subject like Knox. So whenever ungodly princes fail to carry out their God-given duties, it is the obligation of the godly magistrates to oppose them. Knox thought that the magistrates' responsibility to oppose the prince should hardly be thought unusual given that individual subjects themselves are required by God to oppose princes and rulers who fail in their duties to God.<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, like Goodman who published before him, Knox found it necessary to explain how a literal reading of Romans 13 squared with the radical deduction that the subjects had the obligation to rise up against ungodly rulers.

In Appellation, Knox's greatest concern was to use Romans 13 to describe the duties of magistrates, particularly emphasizing their high responsibility to eradicate idolatry as it exists in the form of the Roman Church. In the apostle's words he finds expressed the general duties of the magistrates, the required obedience and highest responsibilities of the subjects, and the depiction of lawful powers. He attempted to

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 102.

show that magistrates are protectors and avengers, owed obedience as lawful powers even above the clergy.

Knox believed that St. Paul had outlined three general duties for magistrates in Romans 13. The first was based on the magistrate's position as one who is to be feared by the evildoer, but not by those who do good and receive commendation for the same. This responsibility is two-pronged: the God-ordained ruler is charged with punishing evildoers and defending the innocent. The second duty relates the ruler's function in promoting the wealth of his subjects. Since idolatry and ignorance in religion are the chief causes of God's judgment falling on the people of a country, it is the magistrates' responsibility to make sure his subjects are given proper instruction in religious matters. God has called godly ministers to preach the Word of God, and it is the greatest benefit to any people to be nourished by the teaching of the Scriptures. It is a mark of the legitimacy of any ruler that he allows the Word to be disseminated without hindrance among his people. The third duty also has to do with the propagation of godly preaching among the subjects. It is also the obligation of the magistrate to inflict punishment on any person, without respect to station, who attempts to cheat the people of their right of access to the Word of God. For this reason, the legitimate magistrate bears the sword to punish, even to the point of inflicting death upon, anyone who

defrauds the elect people of biblical preaching and teaching.<sup>296</sup> The transcripts of a debate in which Knox was involved before the Scottish General Assembly in 1564 show a refined view of the magisterial duties. Preserving the innocent and punishing malefactors is the overarching responsibility derived from God's ordinance which is to conserve mankind, punish vice, and maintain virtue. In this refinement Knox approaches closely Ponet's distinction between the individual soul and the power of God when Knox observes that St. Paul is saying that the powers are ordained of God but that "the power given unto man is one thing, and the person clad with the power, or with the authority is another."<sup>297</sup> Men given power are corruptible, thus in resisting the power St. Paul could only have had in mind the power behind the ruler over the ruler himself.<sup>298</sup>

Knox says the subjects also have requirements placed upon them to obey legitimate power, of which Knox means the just power of God who ordained that legitimate rulers punish the evildoers and maintain virtue.<sup>299</sup> Subjects must obey as St.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>297</sup> John Knox, "The Debate at the General Assembly," *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 191-192.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 192.

Paul says, but only the lawful powers that the apostle has in mind. Clergy are clearly not immune from obeying legitimate authority wielded by lay powers under any circumstances based on the clear teaching of verse one. Knox, the thoroughgoing Biblicist, took a page from Edward Fox and cites St. Chrysostom as a corresponding authority in this matter: that all “priests and religious men” are to be subject to the legitimate rulers.<sup>300</sup> Legitimate rulers may be recognized by their activism in reform of religion and the responsibility to snuff out idolatry, and the subjects must cooperate with the execution of this duty.<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, the face and name of the idolater who would be punished both belong to Mary Tudor.<sup>302</sup> Knox contended that the English, undoubtedly meaning the English magistrates, should have employed the legitimate power of the sword to put Mary to death, but their failure did not absolve the subjects from carrying out the just sentence on the Tudor Jezebel. It was the duty of all the elect to punish idolatry. Stamping out idolatry is the requirement of a covenant relationship

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<sup>300</sup> Knox, *Appellation*, 107.

<sup>301</sup> By idolatry, Knox means, “whatsoever is done in God’s service or honour without the express commandment of his own word,” *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

between God and his people.<sup>303</sup> Romans 13 thus represents an important support for the larger theme of the Appellation, that no person, regardless of position, should be exempted from death who is an idolater, let alone someone who has actually imposed idolatry upon the people. Thus the righteous have recourse against an idolatrous prince first through the lower magistrate, but failing that, the subjects are bound by covenant provisions to eliminate idolatry.

Crucial to Knox's view of Romans 13 is that the lower magistrates and the common people are only required to obey lawful higher authorities. Knox insists that Romans 13 is only referring to lawful princes. Positively, these lawful authorities are those that tend to their duty to punish evildoers and protect the innocent, and the legitimate authorities are those that can wield the sword. Mary showed her illegitimacy by refusing to allow her subjects to hear the preaching of the Word of God, and by attempting to impose upon them once again the religion of Rome: "that damnable doctrine of Antichrist."<sup>304</sup>

## Conclusion

The radical theories of resistance proposed by the Geneva Pamphleteers shocked English Protestants and Catholics alike. Though there are several plausible proposals of

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 85.

continental influences for these ideas, the political proposals within their anti-Marian pamphlets have come to be regarded as unique, if infamous, in the sixteenth-century context. It appears that English Jesuits in the 1580s and 1590s flirted with views similar to, or influenced by Ponet, Goodman, and Knox, while Puritans of the seventeenth century would wholeheartedly embrace them in their struggle with Charles I. It was their exegesis of Romans 13 that provided both a test and a launching pad to these former Edwardian clergymen, and heralded the dawning of political theories that would provide the seventeenth-century English an alternative to embracing an absolutist state, while they enshrined notions of the monarch existing as one who is under law.

Though the three pamphleteers are usually mentioned together, Ponet formed his theories in a separate context from Goodman and Knox. Ponet was not a Genevan Calvinist, but a Cranmer Lutheran. Unlike the Genevans, there is no evidence Ponet was concerned with the rule of women. He began to formulate his convictions about resistance before he went into exile rather than during the exile as in the case of the other two. How long Ponet had been developing his theories cannot be known, since he led the quiet life of a classical scholar until an issue like the marriage of priests stirred him. The fact that he was married before the official ban on clerical marriage is perhaps suggestive of the risks he was willing to take in running afoul of the regime to support his convictions. Goodman, an otherwise quiet scholar, was perhaps

emboldened by the brash, often insensitive Knox, the consummate risk taker who was willing to test his theories if he were convinced they were biblical.

These three controversialists employed different means to come to similar conclusions about the implication of passages like Romans 13. Ponet, the classical scholar, centers his theory in the New Testament, with Romans 13 as the central passage. He concluded on the basis of philological study that, regardless of the form of human government there is a distinction between higher powers, and the office holders who are accountable to those powers that are ordained by God. God placed those powers in the hands of the commonwealth to root out evil, and the commonwealth may determine what forms and positive laws are needed to accomplish the ends of divine justice. Thus Ponet first sows the seeds of the crop that would be reaped by seventeenth-century republicans, who would question monarchy and insist on the right of the commonwealth to determine appropriate forms of government. While Ponet emphasized God's delegation of law to the commonwealth, Knox and Goodman located their ideas about government in the Old Testament and expanded the duties of a magistrate beyond the excision of evil to a focus on eliminating all forms of idolatry and positively promoting the true faith—namely a Reformed Protestantism purified of all idolatrous elements, all the while proffering protection to the congregation of the elect. Knox and Goodman emphasized the importance of the magistrate who decided to take his responsibilities seriously in promoting true religion, while Ponet was more

comfortable with the magistrate who recognized that he had power in the temporal sphere only, and had no authority to command the conscience of anyone. Ponet believed that commonwealths have a God-given right to change their form of governance, and no new positive laws are needed to deal with an illegitimate ruler who ought to be actively deposed. Since even the king is subject to God's laws, he may be executed, if need be, to address his capital crimes. In the seventeenth century the prosecutors of Charles I based their decision to execute the king on similar ideas. Charles was convicted of a mundane application of the laws of treason.<sup>305</sup> Greater than this salacious application of Ponet's thought is the permanently significant principle that in England, the kings would not be absolute rulers, but subject to the laws like any subject would be.

Both Ponet and the Genevans, Goodman and Knox, believed that the manner of the magistrate was irrelevant as long as he carried out his duties lawfully. To Ponet this meant that the ruler enforced God's law and created positive laws that were indifferent, creating a framework for the greater effectiveness of the unchanging laws of God. To Goodman and Knox, the ruler is lawful if he is a man, and he is actively involved in promoting godliness. Yet to Goodman and Knox, the truly significant contribution is to the lawful means of rebellion against unlawful magistrates. In Romans 13:1 Knox observed that "powers" is plural, and posited that the sword, which devolves upon the

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<sup>305</sup> Michael B. Young, Charles I (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 169-170.



magistrate, is given into the hands of any magistrate called upon to deal with the presence of idolatry in society. Just as the very rocks would be called upon to cry out if no living instruments declared the kingship of Christ, so the lower magistrates, or even the unofficial people themselves, would have to take up the fight against idolatry if the higher magistrates proved to be illegitimate by allowing the cancer to persist. Thus the sword of retributive justice is passed along. In short, Pandora's box was now open, and the innocence and naïveté of non-resistance views of obedience, so entrenched before Mary's reign, would be forever challenged. The potential test of these resistance theories, however, would be postponed for more than eighty years.

## CHAPTER 4 - Romans 13 and the Addressing of Threats to the Elizabethan Settlement

### Introduction

On November 17, 1558, Queen Mary died and with her expired the beleaguered Catholic regime she had restored. Just a month before her death, Mary had resigned herself to dying without an heir, and wrote a codicil in which she acknowledged that her husband Philip II of Spain would have no further rule in English affairs after her death except, "to show himself as a father to his cure, as a brother or member of this Realm in his love and favours, and as a most assured and undoubted friend in his power and strength."<sup>306</sup> Any hopes of Spanish benevolence toward England that Mary might have had proved to be naïve. Because Mary and Philip did not produce an heir, Mary's stipulation for her successor, specified in her will of March, 1558, became moot. The succession took place according to the will of her father, Henry VIII, and under the terms of the Succession Act of 1544. Mary's sister, Elizabeth, succeeded to the throne. Elizabeth's accession was welcomed enthusiastically by a country that had suffered during the last two years of Mary's reign due to economic setbacks, an increasingly

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<sup>306</sup> Queen Mary Tudor, "The Codicil of Mary Tudor's Will, 18 October 1558," *The Reign of Mary I*, ed. Robert Tittler (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1991), 99. Folger Shakespeare Library MS X.d. 471.

grim policy of persecution toward Protestants, and bad news from the war with France, with whom they had been in conflict since June 1557.<sup>307</sup> By the 1570s, the English people began to observe Elizabeth's accession with both solemn religious observances and merriment. Elizabeth herself designed the royal celebration of her accession and each year it centered around a public reading of Romans 13:1-7, emphasizing obedience to the monarch.<sup>308</sup>

Protestants had perhaps the greatest reason to celebrate Elizabeth's accession and their hopes soared. Persecution ended and within a short time most of the Marian exiles began to trickle back from the Continent, the alliance with Catholic Spain was abandoned, as was Mary's project to restore Roman Catholicism to England. Mary's restoration had been a sharp break from the Protestant policies of Edward VI, but now the shoe was on the other foot. During Mary's reign the Geneva pamphleteers had developed an unprecedented doctrine of violent resistance to ungodly rulers with that queen foremost in their minds. The coming of Queen Bess would bring a new age of pamphleteering and religious propaganda. Would the disenfranchised Catholics take up scriptural arguments for resistance to the monarch, and if so, would their interpretations be unique or borrowed from their Protestant predecessors? How would Elizabeth and her ministers deal on one hand with the Pandora's Box that Ponet,

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<sup>307</sup> Tittler, 78.

<sup>308</sup> Paul Johnson, Elizabeth I (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 194.

Goodman, and Knox had opened, loosing not only the possibility of active resistance but questions about female rulers, and on the other hand, with Catholics who were at least cautious and at most disgruntled?

### **Romans 13 and the Elizabethan Jesuit Apologists**

In his reading of the documents produced by English Catholics during Elizabeth's reign, pamphleteering historian Glen Bowman observed a series of cycles in which Catholic doctrines of non-resistance represent the vogue, and alternate with periods in which theories allowing more active resistance enjoy favor among Catholic intellectuals. Bowman noticed the prevalence of resistance theories during times of governmental pressure on Catholics, or when a Spanish invasion of England was rumored or likely.<sup>309</sup> At these times, Catholic interpreters tended to avoid reference to Romans 13 generally, but as will be shown, when pressed to deal with the text in response to Protestant opponents they produced some of their most creative interpretations. Alternately, according to Bowman, when Catholic pamphleteers felt less hostility from the regime they showed greater interest in defending themselves against charges of sedition and more quickly employed Romans 13 to vouch for their faithful obedience to the Crown.<sup>310</sup> The presence of these cycles suggests that Catholic

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<sup>309</sup> Glen Bowman, "Elizabethan Catholics and Romans 13: A Chapter in the History of Political Polemic," *Journal of Church and State* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 533.

interpreters were more eisegetical than exegetical, creatively molding the texts for their political purposes rather than arriving positively at their interpretations out of static hermeneutical conviction, and Bowman comes to the conclusion that their interpretations of Romans 13 were shaped to fit the political need.<sup>311</sup> What Bowman fails to mention in his excellent article is that Catholic intellectuals, in contrast with their individualistic Protestant counterparts, were arguing that the church reserves the right to interpret passages like Romans 13, and that it was the hierarchy of the church outside England that was responding to the political winds within England, providing cues that pamphleteers used to advance their arguments. Tradition, if it is descended from Christ and the apostles, has authority equal to the Scriptures, even if it is not written down, but comes by word of mouth.<sup>312</sup> Bowman hints at this, however, when he suggests the greater prevalence of pamphlets allowing for resistance in 1569 following Elizabeth's aid to rebels in the low countries and Pope Pius V's subsequent issuance of the papal

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 544.

<sup>312</sup> Robert Persons, *A Brief Censure Upon Two Bookes Written in Answer to M. Edmonde Campions Offer of Disputation* (Douai: John Lyon, 1581), fo. D iij.

bull Regnans in Excelsis, which both excommunicated and theoretically deposed Elizabeth.<sup>313</sup>

Protestant interpreters used exposition of texts such as Romans 13 to demonstrate the justification for their individual political convictions. While this was not a concern for English Catholics, who supported the Church's interpretation, Catholic pamphleteers used interpretation of the text to challenge and contradict their Protestant counterparts. As one would expect, there are few extant expositions of Romans 13 by Catholic interpreters during the Elizabethan period, but when they referred to the text, it was in support of the polemic that advanced their religio-political cause. In short, pamphleteering was the chosen tactic of Elizabethan Catholics, deprived of the pulpits of England, to defend themselves against charges of sedition and to communicate their political message. Polemic was one of the few active alternatives available to them. That which social historian Peter Matheson wrote about continental Protestant pamphleteers of the 1520s and 1530s applies equally well to the English Catholics, as it did to the Protestant pamphleteers who preceded them in exile during Mary's reign: "This polemic was the weapon of the under-dog, of those who were hurting and those who were thinking."<sup>314</sup> Matheson further elaborates on the reason polemic provided satisfaction to its authors: "It is a liberating tool; it topples the

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 535.

<sup>314</sup> Peter Matheson, The Rhetoric of the Reformation (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 244.

false consciousness of oppressor and oppressed; it empowers the marginalised; it lays bare the powerbroking behind religious rationalisations.”<sup>315</sup>

## **Two Faces of the English Cardinal, William Allen**

Two of the most influential English Catholic pamphleteers of Elizabeth’s reign were William Allen (1532-1594) and Robert Persons<sup>316</sup> (1546-1610). Bowman calls these exiles the “Ponet and John Knox of Elizabethan Catholicism,” for their contribution of an active resistance theory.<sup>317</sup> Allen was a brilliant scholar, writer, and was regularly involved in conspiracies to overthrow Elizabeth’s regime, including a conspiracy to place Mary Stuart on the throne in her place.<sup>318</sup> Allen came from religiously conservative Lancashire and studied at Oriel College, Oxford during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary, and fled to Louvain in 1561, but returned to England the following year. He attempted to establish a covert center for support of the Catholic faith at Oxford, under the protection of the Howard family. In 1565, he fled to the

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>316</sup> Sometimes spelled “Parsons.”

<sup>317</sup> Bowman, 532.

<sup>318</sup> Robert M. Kingdon, “Introduction,” The Execution of Justice in England, and A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), xv-xvi.

continent permanently and became a priest, settling at Douai, a town boasting a new university designed to continue Catholic Oxford, with an English chancellor and financed by Philip II. In 1568, Allen persuaded Philip to contribute 200 ducats annually for the foundation of a seminary to train missionaries to England. In 1585 he moved to Rome, and was made a Cardinal in 1587, perhaps in anticipation of Philip's invasion of England. The invasion failed, and Allen's hopes for the restoration of Catholicism in England were never realized.<sup>319</sup> Persons was an Oxford man as well, studying at Balliol College, and became a tutor at the college in 1568. Increasingly alienated because of his Catholic views and apparently pugilistic spirit, he moved to the Continent in 1574, and joined the Jesuit order a year later. In 1579 he was appointed as the rector of the English College at Rome, which he gave a missionary emphasis, and he became instrumental in guiding a concentrated Jesuit effort in missionary work in England, with himself leading the Jesuit missionaries back into the country with Allen's help. After 1580, he became a close associate of Allen's, and remained so throughout the remainder of Allen's life, even after Allen was estranged from the Jesuit order in the 1590s.<sup>320</sup>

Allen is at his best polemically in A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics, a pamphlet designed to counter charges made by William Cecil, Lord

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<sup>319</sup> Bernard Ward, "William Allen," in Catholic Encyclopedia, 1st ed.

<sup>320</sup> J. H. Pollen, "Robert Persons," in Catholic Encyclopedia, 1st ed.



Burghley (1520-1598), the chief advisor to Queen Elizabeth, in the latter's widely-circulated tract entitled, The Execution of Justice in England. As the longer title to the work suggests, Cecil defended the prosecution of a number of English Catholics, many of whom were associated with Allen and Persons as missionaries in England, arguing that the regime's legal remedies were taken on grounds that the defendants were tried as traitors and enemies of the realm, not because of their religious faith. Allen claimed that the Mission to England, which was one of the primary purposes for the founding of the seminary at Douai, sent missionaries into England for solely religious, and not political, purposes.<sup>321</sup> Cecil disputed this and published a first edition of his tract in December 1583. Cecil used Romans 13:1 as a paradigmatic text, arguing that it is the first among a host of texts that command obedience to earthly powers. Cecil employs two now-familiar approaches to the interpretation of the text against the Mission: First, that St. Paul, in saying, "Let every soul be subject..." is emphasizing that no one is exempt from the duty to obedience, and second, that this was also the gloss of this passage in St. Chrysostom's Homily on Romans that said "even apostles, prophets, evangelists, and monks are comprehended" as being among those who are subject to

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<sup>321</sup> William Allen, *An Apologie and True Declaration of the Institution and Endeavors of the Two English Colleges, the One in Rome, and the Other Now Resident in Rhemes: Against Certain Sinister Information Given Up Against the Same* (Henault: Mounts, 1581), ff. A ii verso – Aiii verso; ff. K viii verso – L recto.

the temporal authorities. Cecil then combines his remarks with a notation of similar comments from 1 Peter 2:13-14, and calls upon the Roman prelates to abandon their unbiblical practice of meddling in temporal affairs, and instead exercise, as St. Peter was commanded to do by Christ when he told him, "Feed my sheep," their pastoral office.<sup>322</sup> Cecil's accusations were devastating and Allen felt compelled to respond.<sup>323</sup>

Allen replied that Cecil, whom he constantly labels "a libeler," cannot seriously suggest that the pope ought to be subject to any particular ruler. To Allen, Cecil's consistently literal approach to the passage could only mean that he taught that one must be subject to every power that is superior to him. But this was patently absurd to Allen, and he thought it remarkable to imagine that the pope's authority was limited to the spiritual realm. Allen argued on the basis of Luke 22 that only tyrannical rule was forbidden to spiritual and temporal Christian magistrates, thus there is no reason why prelates in general, and the pope in particular, should not participate in temporal affairs. He then alluded to the language of Romans 13, in asserting that there is nothing rulers such as Cecil need fear from the papal sword if they would humbly admit of the

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<sup>322</sup> William Cecil, Lord Burghley, "The Execution of Justice in England for Maintenance of Public and Christian Peace, Against Certain Stirrers of Sedition, and Adherents to the Traitors and Enemies of the Realm, Without Any Persecution of Them for Questions of Religion, As is Falsely Reported and Published by the Fautors and Fosterers of Their Treasons," The Execution of Justice in England, and A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics, ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), 22-23.

<sup>323</sup> Kingdon, "Introduction," xvii.

powers belonging to the spirituals and submit in obedience, which is part of what it means for subjects to do what is good so that they will receive approval from God and his appointed earthly authority.<sup>324</sup> Allen held that there was no biblical passage that prevented those of a spiritual vocation from holding temporal authority, but passages such as Romans 13 teach that there is a difference between the obedience spirituals owe to a “lawful king,” meaning among other things a ruler who knows her or his restriction to governance in temporal affairs, and the unlawful practice of secular rulers who attempt to control prelates and others in spiritual matters. In another work Allen cites the example of St. Paul given in Acts 24, who, when charged with sedition protested that the civil magistrate had no authority in matters of religion.<sup>325</sup> Protestant juxtaposition of the 1 Peter passage with Romans 13 to build a case against Catholics as traitors is ironic, Allen said, because St. Peter required his readers “to obey their princes in all worldly, temporal, and civil matters; to pay their tribute, keep their civil laws, live peaceably and lowly amongst them; yea, and to pray for them, whether they tolerate the

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<sup>324</sup> William Allen, “A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics That Suffer for their Faith Both at Home and Abroad; Against a False, Seditious, and Slanderous Libel Entitled: The Execution of Justice in England,” The Execution of Justice in England, and A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics, ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), 255-256. Originally published (Rouen: Parson’s Press, 1584).

<sup>325</sup> Allen, English Colleges, fo. K vi recto.

Christian religion or persecute the same."<sup>326</sup> Thus he argues that Catholics can observe their own faith without threatening the Protestant regime.

It is no wonder Allen turned to Hebrews 13:17, believing it also to be written by St. Paul, and held it to be just as binding for kings as for everyone else: "*Obedite praepositis vestris et subjacete eis*, 'Obey your prelates and be subject unto them,' wherof he yieldeth immediately the cause: 'For that they watch as being to render account of your souls.'"<sup>327</sup> The argument fits the polemical tone of Allen's argument, relying on a Latin translation that favors a sense of hierarchical prelacy over the more local (and probably personally related) Greek "leaders." Allen was marshalling a text on local ecclesiastical matters as an *argumentum ad tu quoque* to cause his enemy to consider that if princes have souls they must obey and be subject to prelates.<sup>328</sup> Allen asks what Christian king can except himself from obedience to his prelates and pastors?<sup>329</sup> His

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<sup>326</sup> Allen, "Defense of English Catholics," 251.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 246. Just as Protestants tended to juxtapose Romans 13 with 1 Peter 2 to demonstrate the importance of obeying the magistrate, so Catholics characteristically Combined Romans 13 with Hebrews 13 to stress the need for Christian rulers to submit themselves to their prelates, a sort of mutual submission: the prelate yields in temporal affairs, and the secular obeys the prelate in spiritual matters. See John Rastell, The Third Booke Declaring by Examples out of Anncient Councils, Fathers, and Later Writers, that It is Time to Beware of M. Iuell (Antwerp: John Fowler, 1566), fo. 174; Thomas Stapleton, A Fortresse of the Faith First Planted Among Us Englishmen, and Continued Hitherto in the Uniuersall Church of Christ. The faith of Which Time Protestants call, Papistry (Antwerp: John Laer, 1565), 134.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

arguments do not directly suggest resistance, but certainly open the door to an active Catholic response. On the basis of these passages, of which Romans 13 figures largely, civil authority is not only open to prelates, but lay rulers should be expected to obey the prelates on the basis of St. Paul's command in Hebrews 13. In addition, secular magistrates can only command obedience in temporal affairs, while spiritual prelates can apparently exercise authority in spiritual affairs and over temporal ones. It is no wonder why Cecil and Elizabeth's Protestant regime would remain unconvinced about Allen's contention that Catholics would make loyal subjects in the English Protestant realm. But all this rhetoric is not what it appears to be on the surface. In fact, though most English Catholics would indeed prove to be faithful to the Crown through the Spanish threat of the late 1580s, Elizabeth's regime had reasonable grounds for not trusting the wily Allen and his Jesuit compatriots. University of Wisconsin professor Robert Kingdon lists at least five serious plots against Elizabeth and the English regime in which Allen had an important role between 1575 and 1588. And lest one think that Allen protests too much about the purely religious intent of the largely Jesuit Mission to England, Kingdon adds a caveat: though Allen was involved in efforts to overthrow the English government he purposely did not involve seminary students in political preparations. The seminarians who returned to England as missionaries, remained remarkably aloof from hot political topics such as the pope's temporal authority and his

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 153.

power to depose rulers.<sup>330</sup> In fact, Allen himself grew increasingly impatient until April 1588 when, as a newly minted Cardinal, he openly called for English Catholics to ease the way for Philip II to chastise Elizabeth and secure the English throne for the Spanish king.<sup>331</sup>

Sometime between 1584 and 1588, Allen switched from blaming Elizabeth's advisers to accusing her directly of treason. He had for some time complained that Elizabeth was spreading the Protestant threat to her neighbors, Scotland, France, and Flanders by inciting them to rebel against their lawful rulers. The damnable Protestant doctrines lent themselves to such incitements.<sup>332</sup> The longer Elizabeth remained on the throne, the more nervous Allen became about the succession. He argued that Henry VIII was being recompensed through his children's lack of issue, and the consequence of his apostasy was that Elizabeth would be the last of the line, undoing all the good of her grandfather, Henry VII, who ended dynastic strife in England. In addition, more

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<sup>330</sup> Kingdon, xxxiii-xxxvi.

<sup>331</sup> William Allen, *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland Concerninge the Present Warres Made for the Execution of His Holines Sentence, by the High and Mightie King Catholike of Spain* (Antwerp: A. Coninnex, 1588), 48-54.

<sup>332</sup> William Allen, *A True, Sincere and Modest Defence of English Catholiques that Suffer for Their Faith Both at Home and Abroad Against a False, Seditious and Slanderous Libel Intituled: The Execution of Justice in England*. Wherein is Declared, How Unjustlie the Protestants Doe Charge Catholiques With Treason (Rouen: Fr. Persons' Press, 1584), 176-177; Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 158.

foreign warfare was assured as was increased strife within England and without, due to the diversity of religions.<sup>333</sup> Allen, chafing for a regime change, pointed the finger at the true enemies of the country: all those who counsel the queen to forsake the Catholic Church and the Apostolic See. But as early as 1584, he retained the possibility that some representative of God, in the manner of Old Testament prophets who confronted sinning kings and queens, might execute God's sentence of condemnation upon her.<sup>334</sup> Philip II of Spain became that person.

From the perspective of Elizabeth's supporters, Allen became an open traitor. Though there is some debate about whether Allen borrowed from the resistance ideas of the Marian exiles, he clearly employs similar rhetoric, even assaulting her as a woman ruler.<sup>335</sup> He refers to Elizabeth as a "wild Jezebel,"<sup>336</sup> who is worthy of being deposed, among other reasons, for violating the promise of ecclesiastical freedom given in her coronation oath, abolishing the Catholic religion in England, and subjecting her country to the derision of the entire world for the English people's "effeminated dastardie" for putting up with Elizabeth for thirty years.<sup>337</sup> Allen claimed that 1588 was

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<sup>333</sup> Allen, *True, Sincere and Modest Defence*, 185-191.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>335</sup> See Holmes, 157-159.

<sup>336</sup> Allen, *Admonition to the Nobility and People of England*, 5.

the year that the decree of the late Pope Pius V, excommunicating and deposing Elizabeth, would be enforced through the determination of the current Pope Sixtus V and through the agency of Philip II. Previous fears about the ramifications for English Catholics of enforcing the decree were cast aside along with any hopes of Elizabeth's repentance toward the See of Rome, or at very least the abatement of her severe attitude toward English Catholics. All of these excuses for previous inaction were set aside. Pressing echoes of Romans 13 into service for overthrowing the Elizabethan regime, Cardinal Allen now exhorted Englishmen to cooperate with the coming Spanish invasion or be damned for resisting God and his ordinance, his lawful king being Philip, Mary Tudor's widower.<sup>338</sup> Allen completely underestimated the response of the English generally, and Catholics in particular. Most rejoiced with the defeat of Philip's Armada in August 1588, and Allen never set foot in England again.

### **Romans 13 and the Jesuit Missionary**

The Jesuit Persons was an excellent writer and a prolific apologist. Like his co-laborer Allen, he defended English Catholics from charges of treason by arguing that their high regard for the apostolic authority of passages like Romans 13 should assure

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 11-12, 19.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 47-54.



the English Crown that they would be obedient subjects. Persons' 1580 tract, A Brief Discours Contayning Certayne Reasons Why Catholiques Refuse to Go to Church, opened with a dedication to Queen Elizabeth in which Persons asked her to learn a lesson from the presence of different kinds of religious people in her realm. He identified what he called four separate religions in England: Catholics, Protestants, Puritans, and the Householders (Family) of Love. In addition there were numerous other "petye sects, newly borne, and yet grovelinge on the ground."<sup>339</sup> Persons then reviewed each of these religions and their leaders' beliefs at length to demonstrate that, other than Catholics, the seeds of sedition were in all of them.

Not only did he argue that Catholics make good subjects, but Persons added that it was reductionistic to conclude that English Catholics were disloyal to the regime. In 1581 Persons wrote that it should not be considered treason to adhere to a religion different from the officially recognized one. As a precedent, he appealed to the historical background of St. Paul's letter to the Romans to show that when the apostle commanded obedience to the higher powers in chapter 13, he was reminding the readers of their duty to the magistrates in temporal affairs. According to Persons, the rulers St. Paul had in mind were infidels and wicked, but the command was to obey in conscience even these rulers who were vice-regents of God. Persons said that the

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<sup>339</sup> Robert Persons, A Brief Discours Contayning Certayne Reasons Why Catholiques Refuse to Go to Church: Written by a Learned and Vertuous Man, to a Friend of His in England, and Dedicated by I. H. to the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie (John Lyon: Douai, 1580), fo. † iij.

preponderance of evidence from the early church is that they expected the civil authorities to lead in temporal things, but that did not mean that early Christians ceased from engaging in teaching and defending their faith. Yet who would venture to accuse them of being traitors? Catholics, well connected to traditions of apostolic authority, continued to take this approach in obediently relating to civil magistrates.<sup>340</sup>

These tracts of the early to mid 1580s were relatively conciliatory toward the English Protestant regime, but Persons apparently tired of his original optimism, perhaps fostered by the fading of the initial successes of the Mission to England, and the subsequent policy of torture and execution of Jesuit missionaries undertaken by the Protestant regime.<sup>341</sup> In 1594, under the pseudonym of R. Doleman, Persons published a bold statement of resistance, the argument of which sounds remarkably similar to that of John Ponet forty years earlier. It was based on Romans 13. In A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of England, Persons argued that God's ordination of the higher powers only referred to the power that is given to the commonwealth, not the individual ruler. God also does not stipulate the type of government, whether democracy, monarchy, or something else. The identity of the higher powers is the authority or jurisdiction behind the rulers, not the rulers themselves. The ruler is to be

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<sup>340</sup> Persons, A Brief Censure, fo. D viii.

<sup>341</sup> Bowen, 539.

obeyed if he or she rules legitimately, but if the office is “wrongly taken or unjustly used” they may be resisted. It is the commonwealth that has the power to change rulers. In the case of England, Elizabeth’s power to rule is derived from the commonwealth, and she is bound to keep faith with her coronation oath, the covenant with her subjects.<sup>342</sup> Just as had happened in England after the return of the Marian exiles, English Catholics soon rejected resistance as an option to Elizabeth’s government. Robert Southwell, a Jesuit who was hanged in 1595, thought it absurd that what seemed to him to be so few English Catholics with only 300 English priests in the whole world to lead them could actually overcome the monarchy.<sup>343</sup>

The genre of polemic became available to, and was employed by, English Catholics during the reign of Elizabeth I. In adopting ideas that were similar to their predecessors, the Genevan pamphleteers, did Catholics imitate their arguments of active resistance and turn them against Mary’s Protestant sister? Kingdon says they did. However, Holmes says they did not.

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<sup>342</sup> Robert Persons, *A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland : Divided in to Two Partes : Where-of the First Conteyneth the Discourse of a Ciuill Lawyer, How and in What Manner Propinquity of Blood is to be Preferred : and the Second the Speech of a Temporall Lawyer about the Particular Titles of All Such as Do or May Pretende Within Ingland or Without to the Next Succession : Where Unto is Also Added a New & Perfect Arbor or Genealogie of the Discents of All the Kings and Princes of Ingland from the Conquest Unto This Day, Whereby Each Mans Pretence is Made More Plaine* (Antwerp: A. Coninx, 1594), 7-13.

<sup>343</sup> Robert Southwell, *An Humble Supplication to Her Majestie* (1595), 21.

First, the tracts that are designed to defend Catholics who are suffering persecution under Elizabeth's regime are very different in tone from their Protestant predecessors. Allen and Persons wrote with a confidence that many, perhaps the majority, of English maintained Catholic sympathies. They obviously greatly underestimated the true success of the Protestant message, mightily supported by Elizabeth's propaganda machine. To the Geneva Pamphleteers, Queen Mary was fundamentally wicked, a Jezebel who knew exactly what she was doing. For Allen and Persons, Queen Elizabeth was wrongly informed and their Protestant opponents were unreasonable, although they probably saw her as a Jezebel as well. Whatever their private opinions, their publicly stated views before 1588 reflected a hope that Elizabeth would come to realize the threat to her realm from the divided Protestants, and expand the freedoms of her more loyal and predictable Catholic subjects.

### **Institutionalization of Romans 13: *The Homily Against Disobedience***

It would take more than impassioned argument to convince the government of Elizabeth that English Catholics did not represent a potential threat to the regime. Fear of foreign incursion threatening her government had been palpable ever since the death of the childless Mary had left Philip II widowed and bereft of English dominion. One of the greatest threats of the first years of Elizabeth's reign was the Northern Rising of 1569-1570 in which the Earl of Westmorland, Charles Neville (1543-1601) and the Earl of

Northumberland, Thomas Percy (1528-1572) led a revolt in the counties that bordered Scotland. Neville, Percy, and their followers were among the Catholics who had received toleration under Elizabeth's earlier policies, but they had been emboldened by the presence in Carlisle of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Many Catholics considered Mary to be the legitimate heir to the English throne should Elizabeth die childless, if not the only justifiable candidate among possible claimants to the throne, including Elizabeth. However, the rebels did not succeed in their aims, however varied they may have been.<sup>344</sup> The most likely goal was to free Mary and set her on the throne, but the government quelled the revolt with relative ease. The rebelling earls failed to incite large numbers of English Catholics to join their cause in the numbers they had hoped for, but did succeed in galvanizing impassioned Protestant responses to this renewed threat. It provided a wake-up call for Elizabeth's government. If any further motivation was needed to secure the government against the internal and external threat from Catholics, it came in response to the publication in February 1570 of the papal bull Regnans in Excelsis. This decree, which excommunicated Elizabeth and released English Catholics from obedience to her, was occasioned by the Northern Rising, and perhaps suggested that the pope was a co-conspirator.

The story that the government only learned of the bull's existence in May, and that it was posted by a Catholic sympathizer on the door of the Bishop of London's

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<sup>344</sup> Neville escaped but Percy was executed.

house was alarming.<sup>345</sup> The rebelling earls had sent a message to Pope Pius V in early November 1569 requesting help.<sup>346</sup> It was in this context that Elizabeth and her advisers developed a campaign to secure the affections of the country for the queen and warn against the tactics of the papacy, which had returned to displace Anabaptism as the great threat to England, according to her Protestant supporters. In a tactic reminiscent of Thomas Cranmer, Elizabeth revived the genre “homilie” by adding to the accepted list of homilies one last, lengthy, yet carefully-worded version, festooned with polemic. Early in this sermon, Romans 13:1-7 is quoted in its entirety, and the author refers to the text in each of its sections. Though the homily is topical rather than expositional, within its lines of graceful rhetoric Elizabeth’s officially-accepted interpretation of St. Paul’s famous passage emerges.

### **The Book of Homilies**

Elizabeth called for the simplification of the text of Cranmer’s Book of Homilies for greater understanding among the common folk and reissued it in 1559. She fulfilled Cranmer’s hopes by ordering the publication of a new set of homilies in 1563 to supplement the original twelve. Thus years before the Northern Rising, she viewed the

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<sup>345</sup> Johnson, Elizabeth I, 180; Kimberly Coles, “‘Printed at London Anonymous’: Was There Ever an Attempt to Publish the First Edition of the Defence of Mary Queen of Scots in England?” The Review of English Studies, New Series, 49, no. 195 (Aug., 1998): 279-280.

<sup>346</sup> Ronald B. Bond, *Certain Sermons or Homilies* (1547) and *A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* (1570): A Critical Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 41.

practice of preparing fixed sermons for reading in the pulpits as an acceptable method of establishing societal conformity and supplementing the heuristic offices of the clergy. As she made plain by discussions with her archbishops, accounts of sermons delivered at the Paul's Cross pulpit during her reign, and the immediate needs of conformity in the realm, she had a noticeable love-hate relationship with the sermon genre. Among other aspects she hated was her perception of the paralysis created in people by a confused diversity of opinion freely offered by preachers: "Great numbers of our people, especially of the vulgar sort, meet to be otherwise occupied with honest labour for their living, are brought to idleness and seduced: and in manner schismatically divided among themselves into a variety of dangerous opinions."<sup>347</sup> She apparently believed the fewer sermons the clergy preached, the better, and had instructed her archbishop Edmund Grindal (1519-1583) in 1577 to cut back on preaching, especially in the case of prophesying meetings that were then in vogue among what was termed the "hotter" sort of Protestants. Grindal, who thought that an educated clergy ought to be able to compose their own sermons, and who has known for objecting to the queen's detailed involvement in Church affairs, avoided as much as possible carrying out her orders with regard to preaching. After John Whitgift (1530-1604), formerly bishop of Lincoln, succeeded Grindal, Elizabeth ordered preachers at Paul's Cross to drop any

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<sup>347</sup> John Strype, *The History of the Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmund Grindal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1821), 574.

references to matters of state in their sermons, but rather to be thankful for all the benefits they enjoy under her. Whitgift, a Calvinist who prided himself on his positive relationship with the Queen, eventually became hard-pressed to carry out some of her preferences as well. Some of the motivation behind her disquiet is understandable considering she had been repeatedly offended by preachers who overstepped the bounds of decorum in her presence. She definitely preferred when preachers at Paul's Cross kept with the text, thus one can readily see her preference for approved, transcribed sermons<sup>348</sup>

Elizabeth preferred sermons of the set variety because their content could be approved ahead of time without the individual preaching diverging from either the words or the content of the sermons, which produced, above all, consensus on important theological matters that contributed to her goal of religious settlement. The Settlement was important to Elizabeth because she understood it to be the basis of a tranquil state. Along with the English Bible, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer, the homilies could be considered documents foundational to the Elizabethan Settlement. With the exception of the English Bible, these were considered the very elements that many of Elizabeth's Calvinistic subjects had come to object to, but especially with regard to the fixed sermons.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Johnson, Elizabeth I, 354-355.



## Against Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion

With “An Homily Against Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion,” Elizabeth appended another sermon to the diverse corpus of theological documents that supported the Settlement and the regime. This long sermon is divided into six parts, each divided by five prayers, with a “prayer of thanksgiving” as the dénouement. The ponderous message would have stretched the patience of a modern audience to the maximum, but its rhetorical symmetry and wise division into vignettes could have held the attention of a sixteenth-century audience, though its recitation might be the singular accomplishment of the Sunday services in which it was given. The sermon emphasized the blessings to the English people of having a ruler who is “natural and gracious” as opposed to a “stranger and usurper,” and it reminded its audience of the prosperity and general good will that the English people had experienced since Elizabeth ascended to the throne. It also pointed out the causes of rebellion and cautioned Elizabeth’s subjects to watch for the telltale indications and to resist them. In the Edwardian homily on obedience the papacy is mentioned as a usurping power, almost as great a challenge to the felicity of the realm as Anabaptism. In the 1570 homily, the papal threat was deepened and the listener was invited to see that the pope was not merely claiming dominion over England, but was actually laying plans to deceive ignorant

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<sup>349</sup>Peter Lake, Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 232.

subjects and persuade foreign enemies, namely France through traditional ties with the Scots, and most significantly Spain, to enforce the papal will in deposing Elizabeth. If the Bishop of Rome were to succeed in these sinister plans, Elizabeth's subjects would be returned to the former tyranny of Rome under a foreign ruler who did the pope's bidding. The homily does not mention the foreign power by country or by name, but the author covers both possible bases for foreign intervention, either the French threat to establish the former Queen Dowager Mary Stuart on the throne (rendered less likely by Elizabeth's house arrest of Mary) or a threatened invasion of the King of Spain. The sermon offers hints of other internal concerns, to which the general remedy of obedience was applicable, but no danger received the high level of attention as did the threat of the papacy and its allies.

The first of the six portions of the homily is essentially an explanation of Romans 13:1-5 in four points. Of these four points taken from the passage, the fourth is given the most attention and Romans 13:5 is probably the intended focus of the postil, "be subject not because of wrath only, but for conscience sake." That being the case, the author used the verse to make a case that obedience is required of subjects regardless of whether the ruler is bad or good. One must obey or receive damnation, but if one resists the bad ruler one multiplies calamities. The homily begins with a recounting of creation history to demonstrate that while obedience is the principal virtue of a Christian subject, rebellion is the greatest evil. This encomium upon obedience in

chiastic structure that opened the sermon must have thrilled the original audience with its panoramic view of salvation history that contains at its very heart the dark picture of their enemy. The originator of rebellion is none other than Lucifer himself, who tempted the first man and woman in the Garden. Against Lucifer is juxtaposed Christ, who repaired through obedience what man had destroyed by disobedience and rebellion. In this way, then, the author of the homily explains how rebellion is the earliest sin and brought death and destruction to the world, and since it was restored by the Christ through obedience, then obedience is shown to be the greatest virtue.<sup>350</sup>

The author of the homily then explains that after the fall and banishment from the Garden, God gave laws that “repayred” the rule and order of obedience by creating a relational hierarchy that originated in families and then expanded into human government as the population of humankind spread over the earth. The author did not employ the word “covenant,” but described a covenant relationship that came into existence between subjects and rulers, in which rulers were empowered (as represented by the metaphor of the sword) with wisdom, power, and authority to defend their subjects, and subjects were to obey. The author of the sermon then quoted the entire

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<sup>350</sup> Bond, 209-210.

obedience portion from Romans 13 and coupled it with the familiar 1 Peter 2 passage to explain the duties of the subject.<sup>351</sup>

In a style typical of the homilies, the author did not exegete the passage, but summarized it in a manner that strengthened the thesis of the sermon. In this homily the Romans 13 text is conflated with the text from 1 Peter to present four points germane to the obedience of the subject. The first point corresponded to Romans 13:1 and taught that subjects are commanded to obey their rulers, regardless of whether the magistrate is male or female, because he or she is ordained by God. The author took an opportunity to address the arguments of Knox and Goodman concerning the issue of the woman ruler at this point in the deliberation. He used the Scriptures to demonstrate that the rulers that are ordained of God have authority and power whether they are man or woman, implying that St. Paul does not assign gender in the passage. The author of the homily thus makes the point for the first time that God's rule and order are maintained through the dispensing of power and authority irrespective of gender. Civil order does not exclude women, and those subjects who struggle with this new "Deborah" are required to honor and obey her as God's ordained.<sup>352</sup>

Second, from Romans 13:2 the author of the homily maintained that if subjects disobey the ruler, they are disobeying God, and St. Paul was especially clear when he

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

warned that they would secure for themselves damnation. The author was not quick to describe this as eternal damnation as so many other non-resistance expositors were during this period, though later in the homily he made it clear that this was a possibility. However, it seems that the author perhaps was aware that some in the intended audience may have placed themselves in the category of the rebel, and presents an irenic call to repentance in several places.<sup>353</sup> The third observation was derived from Romans 13:3-4 and reflected upon the great blessing the ruler represents to the commonwealth. The presence of the ruler meant good to the good and promised fear and punishment to the malefactor.<sup>354</sup>

The previous points in the first part of the sermon brought the original listeners to the main concern of the author. The fourth point of the sermon's opening section was taken from Romans 13:5 and concerns being subject not just of the fear of punishment, but for conscience's sake. In a creative piece of exegesis the author made this final point that one is compelled to obey whether the ruler is good or evil. Supporting the rebel cause will allow one to escape temporal punishment only if the rebellion is successful—which, the author mentions later, it rarely is. But one's conscience should guide one to obedience to the ruler he or she does not agree with

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 212.

because it is the right policy toward one who is ordained of God: “Finally that if servauntes ought to obey their masters, not only beyng gentle, but such as be forward, as well and much more ought subjectes to be obedient, not only to the good and courteous, but also to the sharpe and rigorous princes.”<sup>355</sup>

There is evidence that this sermon was first read in the northern counties where the old religion was dying out more slowly, and where the rebellion that served as the oration’s exigence had recently transpired.<sup>356</sup> If this is so, then one must suppose that the original audience was made up of people who were torn between their traditional religion and their loyalty to the Crown that promoted the Protestant faith, considered by many of the audience to be heresy. Assuming they were used to set sermons, these conservative subjects who had a high regard for the Scriptures, also must have respected the doctrine of obedience.<sup>357</sup> The author first wanted to show the original listeners that they were obligated to obey the ruler according to their conscience, before he sought to prove that the bishop of Rome had an overreaching and overweening drive for dominion. The author did not attempt to convince his audience that their

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., ix-x.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

attitudes must change toward the new doctrines, only that they are obligated to obey even when they disagree.

The first section concludes with two perils that disobedience will bring upon those that resist, and a biblically-based call to pray for the monarch. Monarchy is the mode of government that is to be preferred because it is analogous to heaven, governed by God alone. Thus, the more good and just the prince rules his country, the closer he will come to the way God governs, and the more merciful God will be to his country. The ruler has a special role in bringing about God's blessings on his people, and so the reverse is true as well: an evil ruler will bring great destruction on the people.<sup>358</sup>

Nevertheless, the author of the homily continues, there is great peril first, in exercising private judgment in resisting an evil monarch. The option to resist is not only closed to individuals who may choose to disobey, but if one should decide to take that fearful step, it is often because his judgment is skewed. And even if the individual judges rightly that the ruler is evil, it should be observed that it is typically the worst sort of people who rush to disobedience. The very existence of the rebels with whom you deal in joined resistance cannot be a barometer of the evil of the ruler because they would be first to rebel against even the best princes. They are looking for opportunities to exploit any perceived weakness in good rulers, such as that they are women, or young, or kind. These "naughty" people are the human resources the country would

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 212.

have at its disposal to right the evil of an evil governor. Could one possibly imagine what would result when these rebellious hellions are promoted as judges over princes ordained by God and the wizened and experienced counselors that advise the prince? No, the author of the homily argues, the rebel is worse than the worst prince. Further, subjects should not be rash because there are those who disagree with the prince and wish him to be removed. There is always someone, somewhere, who is disgruntled with the prince, and the existence of a disgruntled segment of society is not sufficient reason to rebel. He closed his discussion about the perils of individual judgments leading to resistance by saying the wiser course for one who contemplates resistance is to repent and follow those who practice obedience. It is in the call to repentance that one may see the relatively irenic tone of this homily.<sup>359</sup>

The second peril is that though all subjects may be in agreement that the ruler is evil, the purpose for which God has ordained him remains unknown. Simply put, the subjects get the ruler they deserve. If he is evil, it is because they have angered God through their disobedience, and resisting him is still resisting God. If one resists the evil ruler one received because God was providing discipline to teach obedience, then by resisting the magistrate one multiplies the evil that brought on the awful ruler in the first place.<sup>360</sup> A pregnant example is offered to the original listeners in the account of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 213-214.



the late King Edward VI. The author maintains that he died prematurely because of the wickedness of the people. The author drew the incredible implication that not only was Edward lost due to the sins of his subjects, but that the English were punished with Mary as God's discipline! There could have hardly been a more public and official statement of disapprobation toward Mary that must have been supported by Elizabeth.<sup>361</sup> By inference then, Elizabeth herself served as the example of the subject who was obedient to the ruler given as God's discipline upon a wicked people, and Elizabeth was, like Edward, a "natural and gracious" ruler.<sup>362</sup> The opening part of the homily closes with a call to pray that God will give strength to Elizabeth to subdue "rebels and foreign enemies" and to enable her subjects to realize the biblical ideal of a quiet and peaceable life.<sup>363</sup>

It is in the third part of the homily that the author again demonstrates an original exegesis of Romans 13. The author opened this portion of the homily with an exposition of how rebels consistently violate the second table of the Decalogue, that is,

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 215.

commandments six through ten. The results of deliberate sins that are linked to the rebel are chronicled in an anecdotal recital of the kind of deaths those who resist properly constituted authority can expect:

But commonly they be rewarded with shamefull deathes, their heades and carkases set upon poles, or hanged in chaynes, eaten with kytes and crowes, judged unworthy of the honour of buryall, and so their soules. If they repent not (as commonly they do not), the devyll harrieth them into hell, in the midst of their mischeefe. For which dreadfull execution Saint Paule sheweth the cause of obedience, not only for feare of death, but also in conscience to Godward, for feare of eternall damnation in the world to come.<sup>364</sup>

The author of the sermon mentions this in a progressive reference back to the text of Romans 13: “Ye must be subject, not because of wrath only, but also for conscience sake.” St. Paul’s mention of fear in this context refers to the fear of getting caught in the act of rebellion, the worst sort of disobedience, and of experiencing punishment for that disobedience in the here-and-now world. The author of the homily certainly recounts these graphic descriptions of temporal punishment to provide one kind of deterrent to the audience, but also as a relatively light outcome in relationship to an eternal consequence. So even though rebels typically meet their deaths in the temporal realm, obedience for the Christian is not for fear of the temporal result, but the eternal.

“Conscience’s sake” means that the conscience of the Christian is directed toward God, out of fear not only of getting caught and its attendant discipline, but out of fear that the

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 229.

act of rebellion would result in God's consignment of the disobedient person to hell.<sup>365</sup>

And this is just, because rebellion, in effect, combines all other sins. If the rebel unites all these sins then this presents an observable character issue, in which other subjects may unwittingly join to their own destruction. The unaware subjects also have their own observable issues that the hearers of the sermon may detect. Satan, as lead rebel, uses ambition and ignorance to stir up subjects against lawful rulers. Ambition, the desire to be of a higher estate than that to which God has called one, is a characteristic of the bishop of Rome, who longs to be the head of all the churches and lord over all the kingdoms in the world. The original audience would not have failed to hear the parallel between the pope and the New Testament's portrayal of the devil in the warning against ambition. The author of the homily encourages increased biblical literacy because it is out of lack of familiarity with the Bible that the power of the papacy grows. Ignorance thus results from lack of knowledge of the Word of God, and indeed the knowledge of Scripture is the greatest weapon against rebellion.<sup>366</sup>

Much of the reason the author of the "Homily Against Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion" places such confidence in the ability of scriptural knowledge to dispel ignorance and encourage obedience to the Crown has to do with the presence of

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 236-240.

pericopes within the New Testament like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. The author treats the interpretation of such passages as almost self-evidently one of non-resistance to the higher powers, defined as the lawful monarch and all those whom she appoints. This sermon was the last homily to make its way into the corpus of the already expanded Book of Homilies, and repeated much of the material presented in the Edwardian homily “On Obedience,” the former sermon signifying the only time in the book that a topic was repeated. A topic that was not repeated in the Elizabethan sermon was fear of the threat of Anabaptism which was prominently featured in the earlier homily as the papacy was in the later. By 1570, the imminent threat of a papacy that was hostile to the realm was more palpable than the potential internal anarchy posed by the more amorphous religious radicals.

### **English Anabaptists and Romans 13**

Anabaptism’s beginnings in England may be traced to the 1530s, but the references to it before 1558 are confused due to the frequent use of the word “anabaptism” as a general word for heresy during the period.<sup>367</sup> There is a larger literary base of continental Anabaptists from which to draw some idea of how Romans 13 may have been interpreted, and those representatives do not always agree as to its

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<sup>367</sup> Irvin Buckwalter Horst, *The Radical Brethren: Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972), 31.

significance for their signature views of human government and the Christian's participation in it, or for the contribution of Romans 13 to pacifism. There is also an interpretive difficulty in understanding which continental influences are strongest. There is a strong element of the influence of Melchior Hoffman (1495-1544) among the English Anabaptists who wrote, particularly manifested in the belief in "celestial flesh," a feature especially linked to some forms of Dutch Anabaptism. These followers of Hoffman maintained that at the incarnation Christ did not receive his body from his mother, but was given a human body miraculously.<sup>368</sup> The theological development was an effort to fortify the doctrine of Christ's sinlessness, but was rejected by other major continental Anabaptist leaders with the exception of the Dutch Menno Simons.<sup>369</sup> This prevalence of this doctrine in England does not directly give a clue to the Anabaptist views of Romans 13, but it does suggest Dutch influences that seem to fit with a significant Dutch immigration.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>369</sup> William R. Estep, Renaissance and Reformation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 218-219.

<sup>370</sup> Horst, 99.

For the continental Anabaptists, the necessity of human government arose from the presence in the world of those who have turned from God. The Silesian Hutterite Peter Riedeman (d. 1556) wrote that government was ordained “to be a rod of the anger and vengeance of God, to shed the blood of those who have shed blood.”<sup>371</sup> To Riedeman, the existence of government was a constant reminder of humankind’s departure from God and of the necessity of turning back to God to receive that which had been lost.<sup>372</sup> Nevertheless, Anabaptist authors agreed that government was appointed to punish evil and protect the good. In Pilgram Marpeck’s (1495-1556) “Confession of Faith,” written for the Anabaptists of Strassburg, based on Romans 13 rulers are to be understood as God’s servants in their proper earthly province, and in that sphere to them “rightfully belongs all carnal honor, fear, obedience, tax, toll, and tribute.”<sup>373</sup> Christians are to obey earthly authorities as long as their authority is restricted to temporal matters, and with the possible exception of a few like Menno

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<sup>371</sup> Peter Riedeman, “Why Governmental Authority Has Been Ordained,” Account of our Religion, Doctrine and Faith, Given by Peter Rideman of the Brothers Whom Men Call Hutterians (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), 103; Quoted in Walter Klassen, ed., Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 259.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, trans. and ed. William Klassen and Walter Klassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 150.

Simons (1496-1561) most believe that the government oversteps its bounds when it seeks to enforce particular doctrines or punish religious heterodoxy. Even Simons agreed that any punishment was to be done “by reasonable means, that is, without tyranny and bloodshed,”<sup>374</sup> For most, it was impossible or nearly so for a Christian to serve as a magistrate and the crucial matter was the issue of the sword. Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528) was an exception in that he saw the magistrate’s use of the sword was commanded by God as a scourge for evildoers and was therefore an instrument of good. It could therefore be used by a Christian as magistrate in the punishment of wickedness for the protection of the good.<sup>375</sup> Most saw that the sword was only to be wielded for the preservation of order in society. It was because a necessary part of participation in the magistracy involved the use of the sword that most Anabaptists believed that a Christian could not hold a governmental post.

Despite these reasoned positions that could hardly be construed as a threat to any government, the Anabaptists were feared because of their unjust association with the apocalyptic revolutionaries of Münster in Westphalia in the mid-1530s, though as

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<sup>374</sup> Menno Simons, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” The Complete Writings of Menno Simons trans. and ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 193.

<sup>375</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “Concerning the Sword,” Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources ed. Walter Klassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 249.

early as 1523 Erasmus had warned the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, that if the common people embraced the anarchy of the Anabaptists the result would be that which made Luther look orthodox by comparison.<sup>376</sup> A small tract in English published in 1535 opens with a description of the Münsterites as “rebaptizers” who made the tailor John of Rey not only their earthly Lord, but “kinge of the hole worlde.”<sup>377</sup> The powerful images of the excesses of the rulers of Münster, along with the deprivations and atrocities suffered by such blatant usurping of lawful human authority were difficult for the English public to forget. Henry VIII’s original proclamation against the Anabaptists in 1535 had disclosed his three reasons for their outlaw status: they had rebaptized themselves, they had denied the real presence in the Eucharist, and they held “other diverse and sundry pestilent heresies against God and his holy Scriptures.”<sup>378</sup> His third reason was a catch-all that could have included their danger specifically to the political order, but at this early date the considerations were doctrinal, and heterodox

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<sup>376</sup> Horst, 39.

<sup>377</sup> A treuue nyeeu tydynges of the wo[n]derfull worckes of the rebaptisers of Mu[n]ster in Westuaell how the cete haethe bene wo[n]ne and in what mannar the kinge is taeken, and all their deades and intencyons haethe taeken an ende [et]c. Iohu[n] of Ley a kinge of nyew Iherusalem and of the hoole vniuerall worlde beynghe in the aege of. xxvi. years. (Antwerp: M. de Keyser, 1535?), A i verso.

<sup>378</sup> King Henry VIII, A Proclamation Concerninge Heresie (London: Thomas Berthelet, Regius Impressor, 1535), 1.



theology was considered a danger to the state. The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England, published in 1552, contained a number of allusions to Anabaptist heresies. The forty-first article was specifically designed to combat the chiliasm associated with the Münster heresy.<sup>379</sup> By the time Elizabeth acceded to the throne, one of the chief perceptions of the Anabaptists was that they were misanthropic in a way that made their presence in society intolerable. They were feared out of all proportion to their actual numbers and lumped together with all kinds of religious radicals. These perceptions were already operating in the reign of Edward VI. In a memorable passage from The English Reformation, A. G. Dickens called Anabaptism “the fashionable menace of 1552.”<sup>380</sup> By 1553, perceptions of the political dangers of Anabaptism were already developing. In that year, Thomas Cranmer ordered a Maidstone schoolmaster named Thomas Cole (1530-1571) to preach a recantation sermon. Cole had been a member of a large conventicle at Bocking in Essex that had been one of the earliest examples of a group of English Protestants who were consciously attempting to separate themselves from participation in the English Church. These incipient separatists held that it was unbiblical for a local congregation of Christians to contain an

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<sup>379</sup> Articles agreed on by the bishoppes, and other learned menne in the synode at London, in the yere of our Lorde Godde, M.D.LII. for the auoiding of controuersie in opinions, and the establishment of a godlie concorde, in certeine matiers of religion (London: Richardus Craftonus, 1553), C iv recto.

<sup>380</sup> A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation, 281.

admixture of godly and ungodly people. Cole was one among those who believed it was necessary for the godly to hold themselves apart from the ungodly.<sup>381</sup> There is no evidence that the Bocking conventicle held any of the distinctive Anabaptist views except that they gathered outside the lawful bounds of the institutional Church. Nevertheless, with Cranmer in attendance, Cole carried out his obligation by warning against all sorts of dangers subsumed under the general heading of “Anabaptist.” According to the preacher they not only held free will, but they denied predestination, held to universal salvation, extended the atonement to covering Christ’s sins, and practiced wife-swapping.<sup>382</sup> Cole concluded that Anabaptists “mislyke all public and common order,”<sup>383</sup> and that the solution to the “evil flours (flowers)” of their doctrines creeping into English society was for each degree to obey those to whom they lawfully

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<sup>381</sup> R. J. Acheson, Radical Puritans in England 1550-1660, Seminar Studies in History (New York: Longman, Inc., 1990), 3.

<sup>382</sup> Thomas Cole, A Godly and Frutefull Sermon, Made at Maydestone in the County of Kent the Fyrst Soday in Lent, in the Presence of the Most Reuerend Father in God Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury. &c. by M. Thomas Cole Scholemayster There, Againste Dyuers Erronious Opinions of the Anabaptistes and Others (London: Reginalde Wolfe, 1553), C iv recto, B vi recto, B iii verso, C i recto, C ii recto.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, C v recto.

owed obedience: justices and other officers of the government, husbands, masters, and parents.<sup>384</sup>

Anabaptists were an easy target for a regime that demanded obedience because they were not only misanthropes, they were foreigners. The insularity of the English was a most prized possession, and strange doctrines could only be brought in from the outside. The 1535 proclamation emphasized that their heresies were being imported and gave Anabaptists twelve days to leave England or face the penalty of death.<sup>385</sup> In 1560 Elizabeth made her own proclamation against Anabaptists and gave them twenty days to “depart upon pain of forfeit of goods and chattels to be imprisoned and further punished according to the laws ecclesiastical and temporal.”<sup>386</sup> The proclamation noted that the particular problem was in London itself and the port cities to which they “come with sundry parties [from] beyond the seas into this her realm.”<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., E I recto.

<sup>385</sup> Henry VIII.

<sup>386</sup> Queen Elizabeth I, *By the Quene the Quenes Maiestie Understandinge, that of Late Tyme Sundry Persons Beynge Infected with Certayne Daungerous and Pernicious Opinions, in Matters of Religion, Contrarye to the Fayth of the Church of Chryste, as Anabaptistes and Suche Lyke* (London : Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1560).

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

As a result of its unlawful status in English society in the sixteenth century, contemporary misperceptions of what Anabaptists were and believed, and exotic associations that appealed to popular xenophobia, it is little wonder that few English Anabaptist documents are extant, let alone those that might include a reference to Romans 13. One of these was the tract authored by “I. B. (perhaps J. B., a very common set of initials),” A Brief and Faithful Declaration of the True Faith of Christ, from 1547, an attempt on the part of Edwardian Anabaptists to set the record straight concerning what they really believed:

We therefore...will not be moved with the sclander of wicked people, the which sclander our faith for heresy, and yet many of them we knowe not what we beleve, but as they here of oure adversaryes, and thereafter do they judge us. Notwithstandynge though we do not regard their sclander, yet neverthesse wyll we (so farre as it is possible) mete them, & write (through the grace of God) oure faith: bycause that euey man maye reade it, and then may they with understanding and with Christen charitie judge.<sup>388</sup>

The tract presents the most controversial elements of the Anabaptists, and the author devotes a great deal of space to distinguishing between the true tenets of his faith and that of the contemptible Münster revolutionaries. Unlike the latter, I. B. believes that Christ’s kingdom is not carnal or earthly, but that he is king of a spiritual kingdom, Mount Zion, the faithful congregation of true believers. Of Mount Zion, he says, “as its

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<sup>388</sup> I. B., A brife and faythfull declaration of the true fayth of Christ made by certeyne men suspected of heresy in these articles folowyng (London: J. Day?, 1547), A ii verso.

lord is a spirit, so is his kingdome spiritually within us and not of the worlde."<sup>389</sup> This author declares that chiliasm as held and practiced by those at Münster is a "dreadful error, and a great heresy," yet their errors have brought "great slander and hindrance of the true gossell of God."<sup>390</sup> The Protestant princes need have no fear of these Anabaptists, insists I. B., because they are pursuing a spiritual kingdom, and the only weapons with which they are armed are spiritual ones.

Though not directly quoting Romans 13, the author of the tract alludes to St. Paul's teaching on obedience to the civil authorities. The discussion of obedience reflects much of the anxiety that would be expected of an outlaw accused of heresy, and the magistrates charged with sniffing out and extinguishing that heresy are upbraided for their thoughtlessness. Still, as St. Paul says in Romans 12, vengeance is not an option available to the Christian and so, according to I. B., one must accept the fact of suffering. The author turns this upon the magistrates who have departed from wielding authority in the proper sphere, because like many, they begin to imagine that the words of Christ, that is, the commands of how Christians are to conduct themselves in the world, are no longer in force. Those who support an earthly regime cast about for biblical precedent for temporal kingship and find it delineated under the old covenants.

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid., B ii verso.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., B iii recto.

It is evident that the tract's author believes that much of the problem in discussing obedience is that too many want to appeal to the Old Testament rather than the New, and the result is that the carnal sword that God permitted in the days before Christ comes to be exalted over the spiritual weaponry available to Christians in the present dispensation.<sup>391</sup> Rulers forget that God will hold them accountable for the unjust way in which they conduct their office. The princes who wield the carnal sword are, "so full of tyranny that they do persecute the Chrysten and without any mercy put them to the moste greivous and cruell death not remembryng that the innocent bloud of the righteouse Abell cryteth for vengeaunce againste the murderer Cain."<sup>392</sup> Later the Forty-Two Articles would vindicate the magistrates from attacks such as this on the temporal sword. The forty-second article read, "It is lawefull for Christians at the commaundment of the Magistrate, to weare weapons, and to serve in laweful warres."<sup>393</sup>

But there was also much misunderstanding about the Anabaptist position on the role and legitimacy of the higher powers. There does not seem to be a consistent

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., B iii recto-verso.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., B v verso.

<sup>393</sup> Articles agreed on by the bishoppes, C iii verso.

position among them, but some at least followed the Dutch Menno's teaching that the magistracy has the potential to promote godliness in society. John Champneys (d.1559) was a Melchiorite Anabaptist from Somerset who was examined before Thomas Cranmer at St. Paul's, London in April, 1549 and at that time recanted six specific heresies. He survived into Elizabeth's reign and became a chief exponent of the free will position, and wrote a book on the subject, now lost. Before his recantation, he had written a book, The Harvest is at Hand which, along with public preaching, had brought him to the attention of the authorities. Much of the content of the book is an apologetic for a literal hermeneutic consistently applied to the Scriptures, but the book opens with an expressed prayer that God would so bless the young King Edward that he would bring about the destruction of the false priests and prophets as King Josiah did, and thereby restore his people to the liberty of the gospel. Here was a nod to the very preference for Old Testament precedents that I.B. had warned against. Indeed, Chamneys writes, God is with such rulers that seek his glory, but seeks the deposition and utter suppression of hypocrites like the prelacy who persuaded kings to assist in their devilry.<sup>394</sup> Chamneys' Erastian call for action on the part of the king in purifying the established church does not appear to be the words of a separatist, and indeed historian Irwin Horst of Amsterdam University made the point that English

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<sup>394</sup> John Champneys, *The Harvest is at Hand, Wherin the Tares Shall be Bound, and Cast into the Fyre and Brent*. (London: Humfrey Powell, 1548), A vi recto-verso.

Anabaptism was not separatist, leaving no record that said they desired a formal or institutional expression of their faith. He maintained that their penchant for conventicles was more an expression of their incipient pietism than their desire to withdraw.<sup>395</sup> The concern Chamney expressed in his book about identifying genuine believers apparently did not arise out of a concern to secede from the English Church, but to be a catalyst for its cleansing and to employ the magistracy as a help in bringing about the restoration of the Church. Juxtaposed to this is Hugh Latimer's contention, expressed in a 1549 sermon preached before the king, that he knew of one English town alone where over 500 Anabaptists lived who "will have no magistrates nor judges on the earth." Latimer's point was that the Anabaptists of that town were able to flourish because the bishop of that diocese was not a "preaching prelate." Defective theology results when the bishops of the reformed church do not perform their duty to instruct.<sup>396</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>395</sup> Horst, 178-179. Horst even goes so far as to suggest that an insistence on adult rebaptism was not an essential feature of English Anabaptism at least up until the reign of Mary.

<sup>396</sup> Hugh Latimer, *The Seconde Sermon of Master Hughe Latemer Whych He Preached Before the Kynges Maiestie w[ith]in Hys Graces Palayce at Westminster Ye XV day of Marche M.CCC.CC.XLIX* (London: John Day, 1549), K i recto – K ii verso.



The Elizabethan settlement was largely welcomed by a nation that had suffered during the last few years of Mary's Tudor's reign, and on which the Protestant Reformation had made significant inroads. From the beginning the new regime was wary, and its keynote was sounded in the annual accession celebrations by the reading of Romans 13: obedience. Elizabeth's administration saw two major internal religious threats in Catholicism and Anabaptism. To a large extent the Anabaptists played the part of bogeymen. They were feared for their supposed views of anarchy, strange rites, and their foreign origins, but posed little real threat. Resident and expatriate Catholics posed a greater potential threat, especially due to their political connections with England's enemies. Elizabeth had a special place in her heart for set sermons, and revived the requirement of regular reading of the Edwardian homilies and added a new one on obedience as a calculated means of reinforcing the message of the positive contribution of an obedient subject to the general welfare of the kingdom. Elizabeth's strategy apparently worked for the English people developed a strong sense of Protestant identity throughout her long reign.

Both English Catholics and Anabaptists produced few expositions of Romans 13 during the Elizabethan era. Catholics often defended themselves as faithful subjects of the Crown and proved their loyalty by appealing to Romans 13. Nevertheless, many Catholics remained under suspicion, and exiled Catholics such as William Allen and Robert Persons, who were involved in writing and pastoral preparation toward the goal

of religious reconquest of England, did not help allay the fears of the regime. Allen and Persons made a contribution to resistance theory that seemed very similar to the Protestant resistance theories of Knox, Goodman, and Ponet, with the exception that scriptural arguments had more polemic than devotional value for the exiled Catholics. The Catholic pamphleteers used Romans 13 in a way that was similar to their Protestant counterparts from the Marian era: Romans 13 had to be addressed interpretively because their Protestant enemies put stock in a plain meaning that precluded the possibility that prelates could hold temporal power, or that resistance to a heretic ruler was forbidden by St. Paul.

In the end, English Catholic pamphleteers underestimated both the resolve of their Hapsburg benefactors and the genuine acceptance of Protestant ideas among the English people. The public reading throughout the land of set homilies, especially employing Romans 13:1-7, that enjoined obedience to the Protestant monarch were effective in solidifying the regime's settlement and in convincing a generation of English people that obedience, rather than resistance, is the duty of the Christian subject.

## CHAPTER 5 - God Help the King: Seventeenth-Century Uses of Sixteenth-Century Formulations

### Introduction

By 1649, when poet John Milton wrote his apology for the execution of Charles I, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, some of the works of the radical Protestant pamphleteers who wrote from their continental exile in the mid-sixteenth century had become the focus of a revived thinking in resistance theory. After accession of Elizabeth in 1558, the works of Ponet, Goodman, and Knox had been largely ignored or forgotten. The continental exiles returned and the importance of resistance theology waned, while interest in ecclesiology waxed. Because obedience to the clergy became a hotter topic than obedience to the queen, biblical passages that taught deference to prelates, such as Hebrews 13:7 and 13:17, displaced Romans 13:1-7 as debated texts. A lack of fresh approaches to interpreting the Romans passage accompanied a general acceptance that non-resistance was the biblical position. This state of affairs continued throughout the remainder of Elizabeth's reign, through the regimes of James I and Charles I, until the 1640s. When tensions grew in the seventeenth century between supporters of the Stuart monarchy and those who wanted greater reformation of the English Church than three

consecutive rulers were willing to offer, the resistance ideas of the Marian exiles received a renewed consideration.

Prior to the 1640s, English interpreters generally supported the conservative position on submission to civil authority, that is, a non-resistance view of Romans 13:1-7. They believed that St. Paul had taught the duty of obedience to rulers, regardless of whether they were godly or wicked, with the caveat that the general rule of obedience did not apply to anything that was commanded contrary to the Scriptures. For the most part, they held that if one could not comply with the unbiblical demands of the civil authorities, one would have to suffer humbly the consequences because God had some significant purpose in imposing the suffering and would deal with the tyranny in his own time.

### **The Stuarts and the Growth of Episcopacy**

Anglican conformists joined a literal, or plain, reading of Romans 13 with reason and natural law to support the conservative position. At Oxford in 1610, John Dunster, a fellow of Magdalen College, preached a sermon on 1 Peter defending the non-resistance stance. In quoting Romans 13:1, Dunster asserted that since primitive times Christians had believed that St. Paul taught they were obligated to obey the ruler under any circumstances, despite the fact that the Roman higher powers to whom St. Paul referred were “cruell & merciless Tyrants” who poured out abuse upon Christians more

than any other group.<sup>397</sup> Robert Pricke's domestic handbook, published in 1616, contained the assertion that the wisest heathen know that magistrates come from God. Pricke (d. 1608) cited Romans 13 as proof of his assertion that the command of St. Paul was a universal one.<sup>398</sup>

Controversy over ecclesiastical structure carried over into the seventeenth century from the Elizabethan era as James' refusal to restructure the English Church excited the passions of the presbyterian wing of the Puritan party in the Church of England. Submission to the king was not in question, but the conformists responded with biblical support for the episcopal hierarchy. Romans 13 had become a centerpiece of non-resistance to civil authority, but passages like Hebrews 13:17, which had been employed by Catholic expositors in the sixteenth century, took center stage in the protracted struggle over retention of the highest levels of the church hierarchy. The scholarly royalist vicar of Southam, Francis Holyoake, argued in a 1610 sermon about the Hebrews passage that there had always been degrees in Christ's Church since the

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<sup>397</sup>John Dunster, *Caesars Penny, or A Sermon of Obedience Proving by the Practise of All Ages, That All Persons Ought to be Subiect to the King, as to the Superiour* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1610), 8.

<sup>398</sup>Robert Pricke, *The Doctrine of Subiection to God and the King Gathered Out of the 5. Commandement: Fit for All the Kings Subiects to Read, Wherein They May Learne True Obedience* (London: T. Downes and E. Dawson, 1616), C2. Pricke's book had a section for magistrates themselves, in which he exhorted them to have a true fear of God and love for their subjects.

first centuries of the Christian era, both in the eastern and western churches.<sup>399</sup>

Nevertheless, he noted that the prelates of his time suffered from insufficient remuneration.<sup>400</sup> Holyoake believed Romans 13 supported non-resistance because St. Paul called the Roman magistrates “God’s ministers” at a time when there were no Christian princes.<sup>401</sup> John Featly (1605-1666), a chaplain to Charles I, argued in a 1635 sermon also based on Hebrews 13 that logic leads to the conclusion there must be superiors and inferiors, and that it is reasonable that inferiors submit to their superiors whether in human monarchy or in ecclesiastical episcopacy. Though the author of Hebrews (whom Featly believed to be St. Paul) spoke of several sets of hierarchical relationships, the chaplain saw Romans 13 as showing God to be the ground of the hierarchy of rule: “Kings command, and we obey; ‘tis our Apostles injunction, Rom. 13.”<sup>402</sup> But the King of England does not just watch over the physical bodies of his subjects. As Defender of the Faith he also watches over their souls personally, but indirectly, through the civil and religious hierarchy.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Francis Holyoake, *A Sermon of Obedience Especially vnto Authoritie Ecclesiasticall, Wherein the Principall Controuersies of Our Church are Handled, and Many of Their Obiections which are Refractorie to the Gouernment Established, Answered, Though Briefly as Time and Place Could Permit* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1613), A3. Originally published in 1613.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, B1.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, A2.

<sup>402</sup> John Featly, *A Sermon of Obedience and Svbmision* (London: Richard Badger, 1636), 4-6.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

The king had charge over the souls of the English, but some argued that the bishops might also have control of their bodies. In 1626, Robert Sybthorpe (d. 1662), the vicar of Brackley, preached a sermon on Romans 13:1-7 at Northampton. The sermon was published in the following year and dedicated to King Charles I. It is a typical statement of non-resistance by an ardent, anti-presbyterian supporter of the king. Sybthorpe observed that St. Paul constructed the passage as a “rhetorical syllogism” that taught “the speciall prerogative, and absolute obedience, which Sovereignes have and Subjects owe, in particular.”<sup>404</sup> The major premise of the syllogism was drawn from verse one: “Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.” The minor premise was, “there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God,”<sup>405</sup> and the conclusion was that every Christian was required to render his or her dues to the higher powers. There was nothing startling about Sybthorpe’s interpretation. Others had employed rhetorical categories for understanding the text before he did. What was significant was his description of the “higher powers.” Sybthorpe saw a personal, rather than an impersonal, constitutional reference in *ekousiais huperechousais* (Romans 13:1)

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<sup>404</sup> Robert Sybthorpe, *Apostolike Obedience Shewing the Duty of Subjects to Pay Tribute and Taxes to their Princes, according to the Word of God, in the Law and the Gospell, and the Rules of Religion, and Cases of Conscience; Determined by the Ancient Fathers, and the Best Moderne Divines; Yea Even by those Neoterickes, Who in Some Other Things, Put Too Strict Limits to Regalitie* (London: Miles Flesher, for R. M[y]nne, 1627), 2.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

that included the ecclesiastical hierarchy or well as the political one. Thus Sybthorpe included bishops and prelates as higher powers, undoing what Protestant exegetes had insisted was fundamental to the royal supremacy from the beginning of the Reformation: Prelates were not to be identified as the higher powers, but all, including priests and monks must submit to these higher powers, identified as lay rulers. He never explained how he read episcopacy into a passage that was written at a time in Christian history when bishops or elders possessed no sword-power nor exacted taxes. Nevertheless, Sybthorpe's sermon is an apology for episcopacy, though he quotes Calvin, Beza, and Bucer freely against his presbyterian opponents.<sup>406</sup>

Sybthorpe insisted the Christian owed obedience to all sorts of rulers, ecclesiastical and political, whether the higher powers were godly, evil, or infidels. He condemned Protestant and Catholic advocates of active resistance as those who would replace a "Happy Throne" with a "tottering state." His list of malefactors includes the Jesuits, Persons, Knox, and Christopher Goodman, although he noted that Goodman recanted his previous position. Ponet was apparently unknown to him, but Sybthorpe summarized what he believed to be Knox's and Goodman's political philosophy. They were those "who put the Law above the King and the people above the Law."<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 22-23.



For their part, during much of Elizabeth's reign English presbyterians wanted to restructure the English Church in ways that would allow local congregations to hire scholarly preachers. Incomes of bishops and cathedrals were identified as possible sources that could be appropriated for these purposes. Still, until the 1640s, these dissenters showed relative patience and an unwillingness to challenge the Church's hierarchical status quo, which remained unaltered first by Elizabeth and then by James. The conception of Romans 13 as a text of non-resistance was unchallenged among Dissenters for decades.

All this changed after Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625. Charles appointed William Laud (1573-1645) as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. Laud rejected the Calvinist notions of bondage of the human will and election. presbyterians, and later Independents, appealed to these latter doctrines, sometimes imprecisely referred to as "predestination," as support for a godly lay eldership to govern the spiritual affairs of the church. Preaching of the Word led to the spiritual growth that prepared people for the Kingdom of God, and thus made them better citizens of the earthly kingdom. Laud rejected the priority of preaching, favoring the centrality of the sacraments administered by conforming clergy.<sup>408</sup> He appealed to the Elizabethan

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<sup>408</sup> Godfrey Goodman, Bishop Goodman His Proposition: In Discharge of His Own Dutie and Conscience Both to God and Man (London: n.p., 1650), B3-4, C3. Goodman (1583-1656) was a bishop of Gloucester under Laud, who reluctantly relieved him of his duties when the former converted to Catholicism. Goodman retained Laud's bias against lay governance of the church and the centrality of the sacraments as opposed to preaching, unless that "preaching" is the orders of the liturgical year.

Settlement, the Act of Supremacy, and the Book of Common Prayer in calling for uniformity, though he applied their regulations in what was perceived as a draconian manner, often focusing on the letter of the law rather than its spirit. Of even greater importance to the present study, the House of Commons took a dim view of Laud's "restoration" to the English Church of pre-Reformation forms that exalted episcopacy, and his appeal solely to Charles, as Supreme Governor, to carry out the items on his agenda. Growing numbers of presbyterians and Independents distrusted Charles because of his favoritism toward Laud's episcopal structure and liturgy, and the common knowledge that the king's beloved wife, Henrietta Maria, was Roman Catholic did nothing to reduce their growing fears.

Tensions rose throughout Charles' reign, but a conclusion quickly followed an event that demonstrated the king's insensitivity toward his subjects' religious preferences. As Laud had attempted to secure uniformity in the English Church by command rather than disputation, so Charles attempted to bring the Scots into conformity with the English Church by imposing the Common Prayer Book upon the Scottish Kirk in 1641. This action was met with resistance, and Charles broke from his twelve-year pattern of independence from Parliament to ask for funding to make war against the Scots.<sup>409</sup> This began a series of events that led to civil war between Parliament and the Crown in two phases, leading eventually to the arrest of the king

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., A1.

and his 1649 execution, authorized by a legislative body whose size represented about a tenth of the original wartime Parliament.

Hostilities ceased with the king's capture in 1646, but in 1648, the Second Civil War began when Scottish supporters of Charles invaded England and attempted to join with scattered rebels to overthrow the parliamentarians. Charles, in custody on the Isle of Wight, was engaged in negotiations with a commission appointed by the Long Parliament to extract certain demands for government reforms. The commissioners were attempting to obtain concessions from the monarch that would end episcopacy and reduce the power of the monarchy. When the army won the war quickly, many of its leaders rejected further negotiations and pressed to have Charles removed from the throne. When the king stubbornly refused to accept the most important provisions of the parliamentary proposal, the House of Commons passed a watered-down version of the original demands. The New Model Army acted quickly to get control of the Commons by sending troops under Colonel Thomas Pride on December 6, 1648 to purge any members of the Commons who supported the recently enacted legislation compromising with the king, or who opposed putting the king on trial or establishing a republic. The Army Grandees pushed for Charles' execution because a second, costly civil war demonstrated that Charles could no longer be trusted. About sixty of the 489 members of the House of Commons finally supported the radical agenda and the rest were purged or absented themselves, although some of those who were originally

excluded were invited to return to this “Rump” Parliament upon repudiation of the legislation that compromised with the king.<sup>410</sup>

In January 1649 the members of the Rump voted to try the king for treason and called upon the House of Lords to join them, but the peers refused to take part. Acting alone, the Commons established a commission of 135 called the High Court of Justice for the Trying and Judging of Charles Stuart.<sup>411</sup> Charles was charged with High Treason because he “traitorously and maliciously levied war against the present Parliament and the people therein represented.”<sup>412</sup> The charges were based on a number of collected depositions that demonstrated that Charles had repeatedly made war on the people of England since he first raised his standard at Nottingham in 1642. The High Court found Charles guilty of treason, basing its authority as derivative from the House of Commons, who represented the English people.<sup>413</sup> The king was

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<sup>410</sup> Michael B. Young, Charles I (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 166-167. The more precise way of referring to this legislative body is the Rump of the Long Parliament as it was the remnant of the Parliament that had sat since Charles I ended his personal rule, summoning them in 1640. For the relationship of the Rump to the king’s trial see D. Alan Orr, Treason and the State: Law, Politics and Ideology in the English Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 171.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>412</sup> A True Copy of the Journal of the High Court of Justice, for the Tryal of K. Charles I As It was Read in the House of Commons, and Attested under the Hand of Phelps, Clerk to That Infamous Court (London: Thomas Dring, 1684), 29-30.

sentenced on January 27, 1649 by the High Court. A warrant for his beheading was assigned by the High Court on January 29 and Charles was executed on January 30. Fifty-nine men signed the warrant for his execution, including Oliver Cromwell.<sup>414</sup> Charles faced his death with a courage and dignity that he rarely showed at other crisis times in his life, gaining the sympathy of the general population in such a way that in death he became something of a martyr. At the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, thirty-one of the fifty-nine signers of the death warrant were alive, and of these nine were hanged, drawn and quartered. The bodies of regicides Cromwell, Henry Ireton, and John Bradshaw were disinterred from their tombs in Westminster Abbey and hung publicly in January 1661.<sup>415</sup>

The conduct of the Rump during Charles' trial and subsequent execution appeared to result from ideas that would lead to an experiment in republicanism. Some of these ideas were remarkably similar to those which were derived by Ponet and Knox from Romans 13: the people are directly under God, the king's power is derived from the people, and the people have the power to depose the ruler.<sup>416</sup> The fifty-nine

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<sup>413</sup> Orr, 194.

<sup>414</sup> A True Copy, 108-110.

<sup>415</sup> Young, 169-172.

<sup>416</sup> Orr, 180-181.

signatories to Charles' execution order were apparently people who believed in the authority of the Bible. In light of their professed understanding of Romans 13, how did they maintain a biblical justification for their rebellion against the king, including the drastic measure of regicide? In short, how did they move from resistance to rebellion to regicide?

### **The Tenure of Kings**

The thinking about rebellion was based on alternatives within the English reformed tradition that were put forth by the Marian Exiles, specifically Ponet, Goodman, Knox and others like them. It cannot be a coincidence that Goodman's book on active resistance, ignored for over eighty years, was republished in 1639 and again in 1642. Ponet's work remained unknown under his real name and his writing and ideas were apparently attributed by some to Anthony Gilby (1510-1585), better known as the English translator of Theodore Beza's works.<sup>417</sup> Ponet's idea that the "higher powers" of Romans 13:1 referred to the law of God was employed to show that the king was not above the law but subject to it. That the king receives his authority from the people demonstrated that the people's representatives had the right to depose him when he promoted evil.

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<sup>417</sup> Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds., John Milton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 841.

Some presbyterians, like the anonymous author of The Description of a Prerogative Royall, continued to maintain that the king was subject to no one except God and that the royal prerogative was based on the ruler's godliness, supported by a desire to pursue truth, and bound by righteousness. The duty of the people consists in praying for God's guidance and blessing for the king. It was a sentiment clearly expressed in the early days of the civil war. Surprisingly, there was no mention of Romans 13 in this work although other biblical passages were cited.<sup>418</sup> A sermon published late in 1642 appealed to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 as twin texts enjoining obedience even to evil rulers. The author known as G. I., who was jailed at the time of publication, used appeals similar to the sixteenth-century "Homily Against Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion." Rebellion, he argued, was the greatest of all mischiefs "and who are most ready to the greatest mischeifes but the worst men?"<sup>419</sup> According to the jailed preacher, the worst men were those who rebelled against divinely-ordained authority. But not all agreed on what constituted legitimate authority. Some believed that the king had forfeited his right to the subject's allegiance when he violated the implicit covenant with the people to punish evil and reward good.

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<sup>418</sup> A Description of a Prerogative Royal. Shewing How Far a Sovereigne May According to the Word of God Require Service of His Subjects by His Prerogative. Also How Far a Subject id to Give True Obedience Unto His Sovereigne (London, T. B., 1642), A2-A3.

<sup>419</sup> G. I., The Doctrine of the Church of England, Established by Parliament Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion (London: William Sheares, 1642), 6.

The anonymous author of A Question Answered, published in the spring of 1642 drew the ire of Charles I when he suggested that the English suffered under a tyranny if the king had absolute power. Charles commanded the military as a trust for the good of the commonwealth, but the author argued that if the king turned that army against the people, or their representative body, then he could no longer be obeyed. Though the letter of the law allowed him to command the military, the spirit of the law assumed he would never use it against his own people. The public good must inform the king's deeds, and when he acted in a self-interested way, the author contended, he was a tyrant.<sup>420</sup> Charles sent a copy of A Question Answered with a message to the House of Lords seeking to enlist their help in identifying the author and publisher of the tract. To Charles the seditious broadside could be traced to "desperate turbulent Preachers, who are the great Promotors of the distempers of this time," and he summed up the thesis of the tract as "That humane Laws do not binde the Conscience."<sup>421</sup>

"Public good" was a notion derived from Romans 13. The king was to punish evil and reward and encourage the good. The poet John Milton, who apparently held heterodox religious opinions but was a strong proponent of republicanism, in 1649

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<sup>420</sup> A Question Answered: How Laws are to Be Understood, and Obedience Yeeleded? Necessary for the Present State of Things (London, n.p., 1642), 1.

<sup>421</sup> England and Wales, Sovereign, His Majesties Message to the House of Peers. April. 22. 1642 (York: Robert Barker, 1642), 1.



wrote The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates in prose as a response to presbyterians who were outraged at the actions of the members of the Rump Parliament in deposing and executing Charles. Parliament, when dominated by presbyterians, had taken action according to Calvin's principle of the lower magistrates acting on behalf of the people against the king, but most believed that regicide was going too far. Like Christopher Goodman in the previous century, Milton treated Romans 13:1-7 as a passage whose meaning must be confronted because it was widely held as a possible objection to deposing a monarch. In Romans, St. Paul delineated the legitimacy of rule: to execute the wrath of God upon evildoers. Milton said that when a prince crosses over into tyranny, he is no longer a legitimate ruler. This was not a new way of understanding the text, Milton argued, but it was suggested by authors the presbyterians themselves respected:

I shall here set down, from first beginning, the original of kings, how and wherefore exalted to that dignity above their brethren; and from thence shall prove that turning to tyranny they may be as lawfully deposed and punished as they were at first elected: this I shall do by authorities and reasons not learnt in corners among schisms and heresies, as our doubling divines are ready to calumniate, but fetched out of the midst of choicest and most authentic learning, and no prohibited authors nor many heathen, but Mosaical, Christian, orthodoxal and, which must needs be more convincing to our adversaries, Presbyterical.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates Proving, That It is Lawfull, and Hath Been Held So Through All Ages, For Any, Who Have the Power, To Call To Account a Tyrant, or Wicked King, and After Due Conviction, To Depose, and Put Him, To Death, If the Ordinary Magistrate Have Neglected, or Deny'd To Doe It : and That They, Who If Late So Much Blame Deposing, Are the Men That Did It Themselves* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649), 8.

Milton interpreted the “higher powers” in Romans 13:1 in the usual sense of human rulers. He said that they were designed to be a terror to evil, and that their commission was to punish evildoers and encourage the good. However, when they do the opposite of the commission their subjects are neither obligated to obey, nor is non-resistance to be expected. Milton said, with St. Chrysostom, that St. Paul’s “words were not written in behalf of a tyrant.”<sup>423</sup>

In addressing the legitimacy of the “powers that be,” Milton said that kings will always boast that their office is of God, but are forced to point to a time in the past when the people chose them, or their ancestor, for their position. Thus in coming into power they are more than willing to call the people the instrument of God. Why then cannot the people also be the instrument of God’s deposition? Milton wrote, “For if it needs must be a sin in them to depose, it may as likely be a sin to have elected.”<sup>424</sup> God ordained the higher powers by the agency of people and he can reject them through the same agency. Milton appealed to an argument similar to that made by John Knox in the previous century: the power was conferred on the ruler as a trust by the people, who must reassume that power if it is abused even if the magistrates will not take it on for the public good. And when does this occur? It happens when the ruler fits the

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 18.

description of a tyrant: "A Tyrant, whether by right or wrong coming to the crown is he who, regarding neither in Law, nor in the common good, reigns only for himself and his faction."<sup>425</sup> The king of England had no greater right to govern his people as a tyrant than the king of Spain had to govern England at all, yet if the Spanish monarch can be lawfully killed in war, why not the tyrant? This deposition was not unlawful if the people sought "all due means of redress" without satisfaction, and deposing the monarch became a renunciation of the title to supremacy and put an end to any expectation of the people's allegiance.<sup>426</sup>

After citing historical examples of disaster that followed when a people deposed a king but allowed him to live and return to power, Milton listed precedents among Reformed authors that his reading audience would have revered. Among these were Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, Knox, and Christopher Goodman. Milton credits them with the same belief about the deposition of tyranny that was formulated during "the purest time of reformation," and cited the Scottish deposition of Queen Mary Stuart in

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 21, 33.

1567 as a precedent, even pointing out that those presbyterians argued that they freely chose their monarchs and could depose them by death or banishment.<sup>427</sup>

## Conclusion

Seventeenth-century English interpreters of Romans 13 offered relatively little original thinking about the passage, and most accepted the non-resistance view as the legitimate understanding of what St. Paul had written. Until tensions reached a breaking point between the king and Parliament in 1641 and civil wars ensued, there was greater interest in biblical passages that argued for or against patterns of ecclesiastical structure, such as Hebrews 13. After the accession of Charles I, those who opposed a continuation of episcopal government in the English Church were dismayed both by Charles' ecclesiastical appointments and what were perceived as his Catholic sympathies. Increasingly an influential minority of interpreters reached back to the active resistance models of the sixteenth-century Marian exiles for plausible explanations of the Romans 13 passage that allowed for deposing the monarch. Presbyterian support of Parliament originally appears to be akin to Calvin's appeal to the lower magistrate, but those with a more radical approach feared the ramifications of reconciliation with Charles, particularly after the king attempted to enlist Scottish, and

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

thus foreign, aid against his English enemies. Milton summed up the position of the regicides as a corporate self-defense against tyranny. The king is subject to God's laws, but more than this, God's instruments for setting up magistrates and deposing magistrates are the people who are his subjects. When the king becomes a tyrant, evincing the self-interest that rewards evil and punishes good, his subjects may depose him whether the lower magistrates join or not.

## CHAPTER 6 - Conclusion

The title of this study suggests that a shift occurred in the approach of English expositors toward Romans 13:1-7, a seminal text for Christians, between the time of Henry VIII and the end of the reign of Charles I. At the beginning of the English Reformation in the 1530s, most interpreters saw the passage as supporting non-resistance to the king. Non-resistant obedience to the monarch on the part of his subjects was crucial to Henry's domestic victory over the papacy. By the time Charles I was executed for treason in early 1649, the passage was used by a powerful and influential minority to demonstrate that the "higher powers" St. Paul spoke of referred to God's laws mediated to the people of a country who live under magistrates that govern in the public interest. Thus called by God, the subjects in turn "elected" their ruler and could depose him or her if he or she failed to promote the good and punish the wicked, according to St. Paul's description of the ruler who ought to be obeyed. The supporters of regicide drew from a fund of exegesis that was developed by Protestant exiles from Marian England who wrote from the Continent in the mid-1550s.

The shift just described may have taken place for one of two reasons. It may have happened for ideological reasons, out of a growing sophistication toward the

interpretation of the biblical text that permitted the exploration of new exegetical options in passages such as Romans 13. On the other hand, it may have occurred for expedient reasons. Expediency accuses many expositors of *eisegesis*, of reading into the text a meaning that served the purpose of the hour. In this latter view, the biblical text was at best ambiguous, and was manipulated by interpreters who selected obscure exegetical options to satisfy those who demanded biblical grounds. In this view, non-resistance to rulers was the obvious and accepted interpretation of the passage, only challenged when the Marian Exile, and later the Civil Wars, forced some expositors to appeal to more radical views of the passage. The expedience view goes hand-in-hand with historians who claim that the English people did not develop revolutionary ideas until the Civil Wars of the 1640s forced them to consider new approaches to dealing with the threat of tyranny.<sup>428</sup>

I believe that the shift took place for ideological reasons that became more acceptable to English expositors who were increasingly influenced by reformed hermeneutics. This approach combined respect for biblical authority and creativity informed by humanist literary criticism. The issue of obedience toward rulers was the crucible for this exegetical experiment. The Marian exegetes were initially rejected because their views were too radical for a country still transitioning from medieval

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<sup>428</sup> For a fuller discussion concerning historian's evaluations of radical ideas that emerged in the English Civil Wars, see Young, Charles I, 179-180.

Catholicism to Protestantism. Elizabeth I, who required obedience from her subjects and who loathed Goodman and Knox, nevertheless permitted an environment that would set the stage for more radical interpretations of passages like Romans 13. During her reign the English people embraced Calvinistic doctrines and demonstrated fondness for ecclesiastic traditions of rituals. Charles I underestimated both of these developments. Ironically, both theology and rite also created a greater audience for a new approach to Romans 13 that would make it a duty for subjects to depose an evil ruler.

In England, the beginning of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century was an era during which the issue of obedience to rulers dominated all other ethical discussions. It was also a time when most English people placed a high value on biblical authority for governing certain behaviors. Obedience was central to the survival of the monarchy and the Bible was central to reformation of an English Church laden with medieval accretions. Romans 13:1-7 was the most significant biblical passage for understanding the Christian's relationship to civil authority in the sixteenth century, and interpreters had such high regard for biblical authority that the backing of this passage was crucial to the acceptance of any political theory that involved ideas about obedience or disobedience to monarchs. The views of these interpreters fit into one of three broad categories, each of which supported a particular attitude toward civil obedience. Though *eisegesis* was not out of the question



as a technique among these interpreters, societal and political circumstances caused most exegetes to examine Romans 13 more closely than they might have if the *prima facie* reading of St. Paul had not been uncontroversial. This led to creative understandings of the text that permitted the exegetes, whose very lives could hang in the balance based on their view of the meaning, to continue to submit to biblical authority while advocating their widely assorted opinions on obedience to civil authority. Finally, interpretive acts toward Romans 13 in the sixteenth century described a process of biblical authority in the hands of individuals who moved outside the constraints of traditional views of monarchy and obedience to develop a theory that God mediated his call to rulers through their subjects and the powers that were God's law rather than directly to the magistrate, and acceptance of this theory caused the English to reject divine right monarchy in the seventeenth century.

The present study has shown that most sixteenth-century interpreters treated Romans 13:1-7 as an unconditional call to obey the monarch and lay magistrates who ruled in the monarch's name based on a universal command of St. Paul to obey the higher powers. However, minority interpreters developed new approaches to Romans 13 during this era that uncovered the possibility of conditions in St. Paul's injunction to obedience. These conditions were based on the prince's fidelity to the call of God to punish evil and promote good. If the ruler inverted the call by promoting evil, the people were required to repudiate and depose the ruler, even if only a few, or even an

individual, performed the duty. This alternative view of Romans 13 was not effectively implemented in England in the sixteenth century, but became part of a fund for deposing monarchy and establishing new forms of government that later readers acted upon. A different minority view than the one just described made no claim for present significance, but called the reader to consider the original audience of Romans 13.

John Colet's view of Romans 13 was that it was a situational, not universally applied, text. Colet's lectures on Romans represented an historical approach to Romans that considered the circumstances and culture of the original recipients of St. Paul's letter. St. Paul's urging of the original readers to obey non-Christian rulers out of expedience while they patiently awaited God's deposing of wicked rulers was apparently difficult to apply in England on the eve of the sixteenth century. Colet assumed St. Paul had urged the Romans to offer obedience as the opposite of what such unethical rulers could reasonably expect from overtaxed and mistreated subjects. The assumption was that obedience would win favor and cause the magistrates to deal with the unsavory elements of society that vex good people. Colet's historical approach, if one assumes it was representative of his finished views of the passage, heralded a new era in interpretation, but one which seemed to be stillborn, particularly when it came to Romans 13. The historical view of the passage was a noble experiment, but it had apparent little influence on Reformation interpretations.

More influential were the interpretations of Romans 13 provided by those who advocated non-resistance to the rulers whom God had placed over Christians. Edward Fox saw Romans 13 as teaching that lay rulers had authority over prelates of the church in civil matters, since every soul is to be subject to them. The royal supremacy was acceptable since the king had authority over the primates of the church. William Tyndale was an unlikely ally of Fox's view who held that the papal practice of lording it over secular princes had a devastating effect on both England and the English Church. Tyndale advocated unconditional obedience to the ruler based on Romans 13, despite the fact that he was an outlaw in England because of his translation of the Bible into the vernacular, then a proscribed practice in England. Tyndale was typical of non-resistance interpreters in that he maintained the caveat that one did not have to obey a command that contradicted the Word of God. His view that the church was to be subordinated to civil authority may have even gained the temporary approval of Henry VIII, in his reading of Obedience of a Christian Man. Others who held a non-resistance view, such as John Hooper, also firmly believed that even when one was compelled to disobey a superseded command, one was obliged to suffer the consequences. Even those who suffered under a wicked ruler needed to be mindful that a people often received the ruler they deserved. Thoughts of rebellion distracted from that which God might want to teach an arrogant and sinful populace. The proper response to wicked rulers was turning from sin and trusting that God would ease his temporal discipline by

removing them in time. It was God's business alone to remove a prince, no matter how evil he might be.

John Hooper, who eventually died under Mary I, was a staunch advocate of non-resistance based on his reading of Romans 13. Hooper concurred with the view that though one must disobey laws contrary to the Word of God, it was better to suffer for disobeying an unjust law than to protest with violence against the injustice. Hooper used a limited historical approach to the text in which he drew parallels between the situation of the Roman Christians and sixteenth-century Europe. In both cases the prelates resisted the civil authorities and this, Hooper maintained, was the occasion of St. Paul's letter. Though Hooper saw the monarch as the one in view in this passage, who received the appointment of God, nevertheless all magistrates are to be respected as representatives of the king. Both public and private persons are to respect public persons, where public persons are those charged with a governmental duty ultimately rendered in service to the Crown. Hooper also reminded the king that he is accountable to God for ruling wisely.

The official homilies published during the reign of Edward VI with the purpose of being publicly read in churches favored a non-resistance view of Romans 13. In "An Exhortacion Concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," four points are emphasized which summarize well the non-resistance view of the text: no one, not even a member of the clergy, is excepted from obedience to higher powers;

rebellion puts the eternal soul of the offender in peril; there are no exceptions to obedience to rulers and even evil rulers are to be obeyed; and, reference to “higher powers” implies that the obedience to the ruler is part of God’s order, and it would for this reason be inconceivable that lower magistrates would challenge their superiors.

These views were little altered when Elizabeth called for simplification of Cranmer’s Book of Homilies in 1559. As if to signify the ongoing importance of the topic of obedience, another homily, “An Homily Against Disobedience and Wylful Rebellion,” was added to the collection by 1570. It was a typical statement of the non-resistance stance, but added the idea that obedience to magistrates is no less imperative when the monarch is a woman, an obvious reference to John Knox’s call to depose Mary I on the grounds that women are not ordained to rule. The homily warned that rebellion is more than simply a perilous enterprise with little chance of success. It leaves subjects worse off if it does succeed because the rebel is worse than the worst prince. Indeed, the homily advanced the view that the people get the bad rulers they deserve and uses the example of the early demise of Edward VI, suggesting that the death of “the young Josiah” was caused by the iniquity of his subjects who received the wicked Mary in his place. These views became common with those who saw Romans 13 as a passage that plainly taught non-resistance, and this understanding dominated the thinking of English interpreters long after the threats of insecure succession, foreign invasion, and internal religious dissension were no longer as keenly felt, sometime

during the reign of James I and into the ascendancy of Charles I. Anabaptists combined an internal religious threat with the presentation of a foreign influence, but there is little evidence that English Anabaptists contributed anything new to the understanding of Romans 13. It might be expected that dispossessed English Catholics would support some form of resistance, but many were loyal to Elizabeth. It remained for exiled English Jesuits to suggest some form of resistance theory, but their published works came long after the Protestant advocates of active resistance, with whose views they had much in common.

The accession of Mary I in 1553 gave rise to the most creative treatments of Romans 13. Protestant exiles John Ponet, Christopher Goodman, and John Knox are often lumped together as original resistance theorists, and although Goodman and Knox are closely linked in the development of their ideas, Ponet should be considered separately and first. Nevertheless, all three posited that resistance to ungodly rulers was not only possible for Christians, but a requirement. All three rejected the traditional plain reading of Romans 13 and dealt with the passage as a potential objectionable text. They had in common a view that the passage was universally applicable to all Christians, but was conditional in that Christians were only obligated to obey legitimate authority.

These resistance theories were rejected or forgotten by the English soon after Elizabeth's succession, but became available to English Christians who were

deliberating over their duty to Charles I in the 1640s. Beyond this, the resistance views of these Marian exiles used an exegetical treatment of Romans 13 to demonstrate that legitimate political power is not incarnate in rulers, but lay behind them, and God has delegated to the members of the commonwealth the final determination of who governs them and how they are governed, whatever divine sanction rulers might claim for themselves. This view laid the groundwork for seeing kings as elected by the people, responsible to God, and not as those who hold their power directly from God with the right to do as they please. In England, these views were drawn upon not only to resist, depose, and execute a king, but they also made a republican experiment possible despite the divine right monarchy trends of the seventeenth century.

Ponet made several contributions to resistance theory that defined the duty of a Christian subject who dealt with illegitimate rule. First, his philological reading of Romans 13 suggested that the human magistrate was not the divinely ordained “higher power.” Instead, God ordained his law as the power and authority that stood behind magistrates who executed their offices properly. These upholders of God’s laws are to be obeyed when they promote good and punish evil and disobeyed when they fail in the proper execution of their office. Second, Romans 13 does not specify the preferred method of human government, but even if monarchy is the preference, no prince can subvert God’s laws lest he be held to account by the commonwealth, which is responsible to insure that God’s laws are not violated by the ruler who promised to

submit to the power behind his or her position. Third, the command of Romans 13 is not just a command to obey the king, but also all kinds of minor magistrates under the head of state, such as the magistrate St. Paul had in mind in this passage. The higher power was represented by any official, major or minor, that administered justice. Since it is the commonwealth that is responsible to judge the magistrates who operate improperly, disobedience can only be active. Because of the presence of sin in a fallen world, people are incapable of ruling themselves without an appointed civil head, but postlapsarian authority was transferred to the commonwealth, which can both depose their rulers and execute them, if necessary, according to the capital laws that apply to everyone, including rulers.

The greatest contribution of Knox and Goodman to a politically useful interpretation of Romans 13 was locating ultimate responsibility to disobey tyranny in the subjects themselves. They take a more individualistic view of the passage than Ponet, though in some contexts Knox saw the higher power as that which God established that stood behind the ruler. Perhaps due to the influence of John Calvin, they saw that lesser magistrates were responsible to correct the abuses of the highest rulers. However, unlike Calvin, they held that the failure of lesser magistrates to do their duty in disobedience to the ungodly ruler did not excuse individual subjects from active resistance. Particularly to be resisted are the rulers who, like Mary Tudor, promote idolatry in the form of a revived Catholicism and deprive the people of the



sustenance of the Word of God. When this kind of ruler reigns unchecked, it is the duty of the Christian to work actively toward deposing her or him. Christians are only obligated to obey lawful authority, and are anything but rebels when they refuse to obey the command of illegitimate magistrates. Legitimate magistrates are those that have a healthy fear of God evidenced by taking their stewardship responsibility so seriously that they set themselves to the task of destroying idolatry root and branch.

Like their Protestant counterparts, Roman Catholic advocates of active resistance during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I were forced to reckon with Romans 13:1-7 as a text that was potentially hostile to their cause. The passage was usually paired with Hebrews 13 and it was argued that “higher powers” included prelates. In this way the regime of Elizabeth was viewed as illegal in that she was not submissive, based on the teaching of the text, to her spiritual superior the pope. Jesuit Robert Persons also used an argument similar to Ponet’s that the “higher powers” referred to the power of the commonwealth behind the ruler. Thus the queen could be disobeyed without violating the need to submit to the higher powers mentioned in the text.

The interpretations of Catholics Persons and William Allen seemed to change with shifting attitudes toward Elizabeth’s Catholic subjects who might be helped by irenic calls to obedience one moment, only to be beyond hope of being able to practice their faith the next. But arranging interpretations of Romans 13 according to political expediency was the apparent exception rather than the rule during the sixteenth

century. There is a subtle observable difference between finding an interpretation of the passage that supports one's view, and allowing a troubling circumstance to be the occasion for considering broader views of the passage. It is more likely in the case of most of the interpreters considered in this study that they were reluctant to depart from a widely-held view of the passage unless there was some reason to consider an alternative view. Colet seemed uninterested in politics and had the discipline of a humanist in studying the Latin of the text and applying historical criticism. It was no advantage to Tyndale to hold a non-resistance view of Romans 13. This outlaw believed that the text taught obedience to the prince except when the ruler contradicted God's Word. Ponet was probably the most disciplined exegete and knew Greek. His ideas are also the most thoughtful and compelling of the Marian exiles. It is not likely that he would assemble texts for political necessity even though he cast his lot with those who disobeyed the queen even before he went into exile. His understanding of the higher powers is crucial to his theory of resistance, but is an attractive exegetical possibility because it fits with other biblical texts that insist the Christian must obey God rather than men. The problem is that those who propose resistance models based on biblical texts always seems to encounter the same obstacle. The Old Testament is full of political resistance to authority that is in opposition to God, and the New Testament supports resistance in some passages and obedience in others. Thus, resistance theorists have to view Romans 13:1-7 as an apparently adversarial text that must be

addressed. Advocates of resistance did not simply hold their views out of “political necessity.” They saw the biblical narrative examples for resistance and applied the analogy of faith, an acceptable technique of the time, to harmonize seemingly contradictory texts. Even the English Jesuits used the analogy of faith to argue for prelacy being included in Romans 13. Having a high view of the authority of the Scriptures, sixteenth-century interpreters assumed there were no contradictions between disparate passages in the text of the Bible. Whether they were correct in their interpretations is outside the scope of the present study, but they cannot be merely dismissed as having fit a convenient interpretation to their political agenda.

In fact, Romans 13 became the lightning-rod of political change because it presented a formidable challenge for exegetes. It occurred when those who valued biblical authority were faced with ethical dilemmas that had to be addressed. This process has been described as a broadening—more exegetical possibilities opened up as those who valued biblical authority searched for answers. To be sure, Romans 13:1-7 was often not the primary positive text a sixteenth-century advocate of a particular view of obedience would turn to first. Its layers of interpretive possibilities made St. Paul’s commands a greater interpretive challenge than other political passages. 1 Peter 2:13-14 was preferable to someone who wanted to advocate monarchy as the best form of government. Acts 5:25 was a clearer New Testament passage on resistance to human authority. Hebrews 13:17 was used to urge obedience to prelates, and a number of Old

Testament passages could be marshaled out to demonstrate respect for kingship or the individual's responsibility to resistance to regimes that permitted idolatry. Edward Fox saw that St. Paul addressed Romans 13 to Christians, including their spiritual leaders, calling upon them to obey civil authorities. There was nothing here of ecclesiastical princes. John Hooper remained true to his interpretation of Romans 13 by being willing to obey Mary as he had the Protestant Edward, though at one time he chose imprisonment rather than bow to wearing the surplice. There is a lack of evidence for inconsistency on Hooper's part.

The most original views came out of the camp of active resistance, and these exegetes had to address in Romans 13 a passage, the traditional view of which apparently contradicted allowances for civil disobedience that came from other biblical texts. Ponet and Persons examined the text closely and identified exegetical options suggesting that God's authority to elect rulers was mediated by the commonwealth. This became the basis for subjects to change their rulers and forms of political administration, and suggested a basis for republican government. In Ponet's understanding the king is subject to God's laws, thus making all human authority accountable to the rule of law. Thus the monarch could be "supreme," that is supra-primate or above the primates or bishops of the church, but not above the Scriptures, which were the most tangible expression of God's law. If a prince contradicted the bishop of Rome he was within his power, but if he contradicted the Word of God he

was to be disobeyed. Knox and Christopher Goodman saw in “every soul” the responsibility of the individual to hold the governing authorities accountable to their call to promote good through destruction of idolatry and promotion of preaching. This individual responsibility provided a basis for concerted political action. It also made possible the 1649 Rump Parliament that took upon itself, though only a small minority of the pre-purged House of Commons, the trial and execution of the king and the charting of a course in republican experimentation.

The years between 1559 and 1642 constituted the longest period of relative domestic peace in England’s history, arguably until late modern times. During this time most English people accepted Romans 13 as a text of non-resistance. They also embraced the theology of the official homilies on obedience that belonged to the Church of England while the ubiquitous discussions on obedience turned to the episcopacy. Protestants began to debate the meaning of other passages, such as Hebrews 13:17 in the throes of an ecclesiological controversy between advocates of presbyterianism and proponents of episcopal hierarchies in the church. Ironically, Elizabeth helped by *not* developing the ecclesiastical structure of the church. She allowed neither presbyterians nor Anglo-Catholics to reform the ecclesiastical structures. She was able to do this amid the threats of a confused succession and foreign invasion. After presbyterians failed to take control of reconstruction, they accepted the religious settlement and concentrated

on supplementation. They developed preaching services, devotional life, and even household seminaries for the training of godly reformed pastors.

Perhaps there was something about Calvinism that appealed to the people of England in the late sixteenth century. For example, the defeat of the Armada was an event that symbolically galvanized presbyterians, and all English people, into accepting England as an elect country and rewarding patience in awaiting the eventual reconstruction of the church. What unsettled and pushed a disorganized presbyterianism into an awakened state was the heyday of Laudian Arminianism after 1633. Charles I arrogantly and unadvisedly supported through appointment and personal preference this movement that alienated those who had accepted the reformed basis of the English Church. Episcopacy and uniformity became the order of the day. Resistance theories, the formerly embarrassing heritage of the English reformed, were materials that became available when Charles disrupted an otherwise smoothly flowing system by multiple antagonisms. Advocates of resistance, who like John Milton wanted to depose Charles, appealed to Romans 13 with commentary drawn from Knox, Christopher Goodman, and Ponet. The text that was used at celebrations of Elizabeth's accession and assured a favored land of the blessings of monarchy was also used to weigh a later monarch in the balances and to find him wanting. Though monarchy was later restored and the tyrant Charles I became a martyr, divine right monarchy never reached fruition in England. The English people had been forever changed by a brush

with a republican experiment brought to them by those who valued Romans 13:1-7 as perhaps the most important motivating political text among all political texts, not just biblical ones. Finally, the expositors of Romans 13 during the period of civil conflict in mid-sixteenth century England provided the necessary seedbed for the watershed revolutions of 1688-1689 in England and 1775-1781 in America.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> For further reading on the notion of revolution paving the way for revolution, see Crane Brinton, The Anatomy of Revolution (New York: Vintage, 1965), 227f. For Romans 13 as an influential passage for the American Revolution see Alex Tuckness, "Discourses of Resistance in the American Revolution," Journal of the History of Ideas 4 (Oct. 2003): 553-554.

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