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The Theology of Elizabeth I: Politique or Believer?

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The theological commitments of the queen of England from 1558 to 1603 have been the subject of much speculation.¹ Perhaps my least favorite review of her personal religion, from a historiographical perspective, was written as late as the post-war twentieth century in a respected academic journal. According to Henry Shires, “Elizabeth seemed to be untouched by the spiritual realities of religion.” Also, “she displayed a complete lack of interest in the higher questions of the Christian tradition.” Finally, “Whatever her religious convictions were, they were of such a nature that they could without difficulty be transcended by other considerations.”² The editors of *Church History* were unfazed by the ability of their author to make such claims while never citing a word written by Elizabeth herself, nor anything written by her contemporaries, whether supporters or opponents. It was simply taken for granted by the dominant historiography that Elizabeth was a studied practitioner of *Realpolitik*.

Elizabeth’s own words may be cited in response to the idea that she was personally irreligious. Referring to the hotter sort of Protestant minister in 1585, she noted that “some of them of late have said that I was of no religion, neither hot [nor] cold, but such a one as one day would give God the vomit.” “Yet,” she responded to the entire Parliament, “one matter toucheth me so near as I may not overslip.” And what was this matter that could not be omitted? It was “religion, the ground on which all actions ought to take root and, being corrupted, may mar all the tree.”³ Religion, and a contested religious position at that, was of unsurpassed importance to Elizabeth.

Following calls in Parliament to further the church’s stalled evangelical reformation, Elizabeth queried, “If policy had been preferred before truth,

¹This essay was originally presented to the British Reformations Seminar meeting at Corpus Christi College in the University of Oxford. Special thanks are extended to Diarmaid MacCulloch, Judith Maltby, and Christopher Haigh for the invitation. It is dedicated to Elizabeth Joy Yarnell, the daughter given to Karen Searcy Yarnell and me.

²Henry M. Shires, “The Conflict between Queen Elizabeth and Roman Catholicism,” *Church History* 16.4 (1947): 222.

³Speech to Clergy (27 February 1585) and Speech to Parliament (29 March 1585), in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works [ECW]*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 179, 182.

would I, trow you, even at the first beginning of my reign, have turned upside down so great affairs or entered into tossing of the greatest waves and billows of the world, that might (if I had sought mine ease) have harbored and cast anchor in more seeming security?”⁴ Elizabeth was referring back to her courageous 1559 decision to return England to the evangelical religion of Edward’s reign, through Acts of Uniformity and of Supremacy. It will be remembered that she was opposed in such a move by the old privy council, her bishops, Spain, and many of her subjects, especially in the House of Lords. As a result, she was personally indignant anyone might later infer she did not care to advance the true Christian faith.

Academic Evaluations

In the last several decades, the subject of Elizabeth’s religious beliefs has occasioned academic conversation. In a compilation regarding numerous women in the Reformation period, Roland Bainton opined, “One might call her already an Anglo-Catholic.”⁵ Winthrop S. Hudson concluded she was both theologically literate and somewhat Reformed in her theological outlook, being generally in religious agreement with her bishops, even if they quibbled over polity.⁶ William P. Haugaard disagreed with the skeptical interpretation of Elizabeth and turned to her Book of Devotions to show that Elizabeth was a genuinely pious believer.⁷

Patrick Collinson, in an early article, wondered whether these written devotions were a genuine self-reflection of Elizabeth. Collinson left the issue of her personal religious beliefs open, using the imagery of Chinese boxes and Russian dolls. He glibly compared the question of Elizabeth’s beliefs with the weighty problem of whether there were snakes in Iceland.⁸ Later, Collinson classified her as “a particularly odd kind of protestant,” because she disliked unrestrained Puritan preaching.⁹

J.E. Neale famously pictured Elizabeth as a *politique*, who initially supported the old religion in the 1559 parliament against an insurgent House of Commons. However, Norman Jones’s careful reconstruction of the parliamentary data demonstrated she was actually allied with the Protestant

⁴Speech to Parliament (15 March 1576), in *ECW*, 169. Cf. J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1559–1581* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 346–59.

⁵Roland H. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), 234.

⁶Winthrop S. Hudson, *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 144–45.

⁷William P. Haugaard, “Elizabeth Tudor’s Book of Devotions: A Neglected Clue to the Queen’s Life and Character,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.2 (1981): 81–82.

⁸Patrick Collinson, “Windows in a Woman’s Soul: Questions about the Religion of Queen Elizabeth I,” in *Elizabethan Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 91, 118.

⁹Collinson, *Elizabeth I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

House of Commons against a conservative House of Lords.¹⁰ Roger Bowers modified that historiography, claiming Elizabeth preferred the more conservative 1549 Book of Common Prayer, but “[g]rudgily and reluctantly” settled on the 1552 version in order to hold her government together against the Lords and Convocation.¹¹

In a substantial examination of the religious sentiments displayed in Elizabeth’s letters, including both personal and diplomatic dispatches, Susan Doran argued that Elizabeth was “an old sort of Protestant,” who imbibed the evangelical, humanist, and Lutheran views prominent in the early English Reformation, moving slowly toward a more Reformed outlook, but always aiming to be broadly Protestant in doctrine.¹² Christopher Haigh offered a balanced assessment: “She was a political realist, but this does not mean that she was indifferent to spiritual things.”¹³

The following review of Elizabeth’s theology is intended to build on the contributions of these substantial historical scholars. It demonstrates that Elizabeth was neither a *politique* nor “odd” nor “old,” but an engaged evangelical believer with her own substantive theology. Following Doran’s suggestion that Elizabeth’s spirituality may be further discovered in her prayers, poetry, and translations, “which were more private modes of self expression,” I have freely utilized those resources. I also utilize Elizabeth’s more public expressions, such as her speeches, which scholars have sometimes downplayed. Elizabeth considered herself a public person and was confident regarding the rightness of her views, so her private religious opinions were intentionally revealed in public ways.

Literary scholars have increasingly concluded that Elizabeth was intimately involved in the construction and presentation of her own image in pageant and portrait¹⁴ as well as in translation and publication.¹⁵ Following this trend in literary studies, there seems little reason to divide her public proclamations from her personal theology. The idea that Elizabeth’s personal beliefs must be distinguished from her public beliefs may have a conceptual basis in her doctrine of two wills, but the distinction may not be expanded to

¹⁰Norman Jones, *Faith by Statute: Parliament and the Settlement of Religion, 1559* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1982).

¹¹Roger Bowers, “The Chapel Royal, the First Edwardian Prayer Book, and Elizabeth’s Settlement of Religion, 1559,” *Historical Journal* 43.2 (2000): 321.

¹²Susan Doran, “Elizabeth I’s Religion: The Evidence of Her Letters,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51.4 (2000): 720.

¹³Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1998), 31.

¹⁴Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁵Lysbeth Benkert, “Translation as Image-Making: Elizabeth I’s Translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 6.3 (2001): 1–20; Linda S. Shenk, “‘To Love and Be Wise’: The Earl of Essex, Humanist Court Culture, and England’s Learned Queen,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 16 (2007): 1–27; Jennifer Clement, “The Queen’s Voice: Elizabeth I’s *Christian Prayers and Meditations*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 13.3 (2008): 1–26.

a yawning chasm by historians. Moreover, Elizabeth's public professions, especially with regard to political theology were, like her devotions, quite stable in content. This suggests that her private beliefs and public professions were not entirely antithetical and that the latter were not politically malleable.

Elizabeth as Theologian

Unusually for a woman in her day, Elizabeth was trained in theology. In some frank remarks to a special gathering of representatives from the Commons and the Lords in 1566, she quipped, "It is said I am no divine. Indeed, I studied nothing else but divinity till I came to the crown, and then I gave myself to the study of that which was meet for government, and am not ignorant."¹⁶ Elizabeth's training in "divinity" was at the hands of men such as Edmund Allen, a chaplain with evangelical Lutheran leanings,¹⁷ and Roger Ascham, a humanist tutor who scheduled her day to begin with the New Testament in the Greek.¹⁸

According to Ascham, she was taught the classics in Greek and Latin, and read among the fathers with a focus on Cyprian, and among contemporary theologians with a focus upon the *Loci Communes* of Philip Melancthon, Martin Luther's humanist colleague at Wittenberg. The method of her education entailed translating from an original language—including Italian, French, and Spanish in addition to Greek and Latin—into English, followed later by a retranslation back into the original language.¹⁹ In her early years, Elizabeth translated Margaret of Navarre's *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*; Katherine Parr's *Prayers or Meditations*; book one, chapter one of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Erasmus's *Dialogue of Faith*; and, Bernard Ochino's *Sermon on the Nature of Christ*. We know of some translations because she presented them as gifts to Katherine Parr, Henry VIII, or Edward VI, but there were probably others.²⁰ In her later years, she translated Boethius's *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, Plutarch's *On Curiosity*, and part of Horace's *On the Art of Poetry*. She is also said to have translated portions of Cicero, Sallust, Euripides, Isocrates, and Xenophon.²¹

¹⁶Speech to Parliament Delegates (5 November 1566), second version, in *ECW*, 96.

¹⁷Bowers, "The Chapel Royal," 320–21; Doran, "Elizabeth I's Religion," 711.

¹⁸Anne Boleyn had appointed Matthew Parker to be her tutor, and William Grindal also functioned in that capacity. Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII* (London: Crook Helm, 1986), 233–35.

¹⁹David Starkey, *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 80–82; John Schofield, *Philip Melancthon and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 160, 196.

²⁰*ECW*, 6, 9, 10; Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 86; Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*, 235.

²¹*Queen Elizabeth's Englishings*, ed. Caroline Pemberton, EETS O.S. 113 (London: Keegan Paul et al, 1899), vii–viii; *ECW*, 327n1. Cf. "Elizabeth I revealed as the translator of Tacitus into English," Reuters (2018).

The translations of the works by Margaret, Katherine, and Boethius seem particularly important, as they mark critical junctures in Elizabeth's life: First, her mother, Anne Boleyn, was influenced by the French evangelical humanist school surrounding the queen of Navarre. Elizabeth was likely aware of this poignant and significant parental reality as she translated Margaret's *Mirror*.²² Second, her father, Henry VIII, a conservative theologian when it came to the Reformation doctrine of justification, received only one letter of which we know from Elizabeth. This letter accompanied the translation of Katherine Parr's prayers. Parr, an evangelical, was Henry's last wife and took a special interest in Elizabeth's education. And third, Elizabeth translated Boethius about the time she became dismayed by Henry IV's conversion to Roman Catholicism. The French King's conversion left the English queen with the potentially dangerous dilemma of a Catholic France and Catholic Spain uniting against her. In each crisis, Elizabeth resorted intellectually and religiously to an evangelical humanism.

It may be objected that Elizabeth's theology, much of which came as translation, was not very creative. Yet, to her credit, Elizabeth was always more concerned with established truth than with speculative theology. Her motto was, after all, *semper eadem*, "always the same," a fact her Calvinist subjects took some time to discern. As one modern biographer put it, "For her, as for Ascham, repetition held no disgrace: if a thing had been said once supremely well, why ever say it differently?"²³ Elizabeth's theology may have been garnered through translation, but it remained nonetheless Elizabeth's theology, and we shall see that she forwarded her own faith.

Elizabeth's divinity was more than merely received. As a child, she considered the contemplation of God through the activities of translation, prayer, and meditation to be "*opus animi*," "a work of the soul." The *opus animi* of divine contemplation lifts a person into heaven by recasting earthly existence; literally "*in carne divinos facit*," "it makes one divine in the flesh," and thus able to endure worldly pain while experiencing heavenly bliss. The idea of salvation as deification—by participation rather than by nature—for Elizabeth was also intimately connected with her own view of her royal parentage and the divine appointment of monarchs. This passage concerning the work of her soul came in a letter to her father, wherein she also noted that philosophers teach that a king is "*deum in terris*," "a god on earth."²⁴

²²It has been speculated as to whether Elizabeth may have used Anne's own copy of the book. James Kelsey McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics: Under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 8.

²³Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 82.

²⁴Elizabeth to Henry VIII (30 December 1545), in *Elizabeth I: Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals [ACFLO]*, ed. Janel Mueller and Leah S. Marcus (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8.

Elizabeth according to History and Theology

Because of the obfuscating layers that have been placed by historical commentary over this early modern woman, pure history must be advocated in order to enable rediscovery. Past history and present theology must be kept distinct. The past must be allowed to speak its own word, just as the present must be allowed to speak its own word. If commentators of today desire respect from those who come tomorrow, and we do, then certainly the commentators of yesterday must be given like courtesy. The voices of history, male and female, must be heard within their context and understood first according to their purposes. Critical evaluation may only follow empathetic recitation. The historiographical axioms laid down by Leopold von Ranke and Herbert Butterfield must surely be taken into account.²⁵

Nevertheless, theology claims a truth beyond history. Maurice Wiles noted that the problem with the Antioch hermeneutical tradition was that it suffered from theological myopia due to its severe restriction to history.²⁶ Trying to maintain historical honesty and theological integrity at the same time is difficult yet necessary for the historical theologian. While planting one foot firmly in the field of history and the other in the field of theology, the historical theologian must restrain both theological speculation and the historicist bias against speculative thought. We tread a royal road between the ditches of ideological speculation and historical myopia in reviewing this important sixteenth-century monarch's theology.

A dialectic seems to be required. On the one hand, a claim to discern faith in the writings of another person certainly requires an act of faith that goes beyond the strictest parameters of technical history into the spheres of philosophy and theology. On the other hand, it must also be recognized that the polar opposite, the utterly dismissive claim that Elizabeth's frequent references to God and his gracious providence are "merely politic" or that her "sincerity" is "doubtful,"²⁷ is as much a statement of faith that transcends the

²⁵I follow Herbert Butterfield's definition of technical history here. Herbert Butterfield, *Writings on Christianity and History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172–82; C.T. McIntire, *Herbert Butterfield: Historian as Dissenter* (London: Yale University Press, 2004). When Butterfield criticized the Whig tradition and Lord Acton in particular with regard to the historian's moral judgments, he demonstrated that any evaluation, positive or negative, as to a historical figure's inner disposition is simply beyond the historian's ability ultimately to decide. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Norton, 1965), 107–32.

²⁶Theodore's commentary on John, for instance, "as a whole is a disappointing book. He has attempted to expound the meaning of the Gospel too narrowly within the confines of his own way of thought. To borrow a phrase from Origen, it is as if he has never lain upon the Evangelist's breast; his mind has never found the spiritual communion with the mind of St. John, and therefore he cannot reveal the Gospel's most precious secrets to us. His work never does full justice to the whole range and depth of the theological meaning of the Gospel." Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 159.

²⁷Allison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of

bounds of technical history as the former, even if the latter is a faith statement of a particularly negative kind. In the evidence reviewed below, due to the dearth of substantive evidence to the contrary, we have taken Elizabeth's theology at face value.²⁸

My hope for the historians reading this essay is that reviewing Elizabeth's theology will aid in measuring her impact upon the religion of her day. Elizabeth's theology is worth studying in its own right, but also for the sake of discerning why her reign resulted in the English church's contested yet longstanding "Settlement." Perhaps it will also bolster the idea that this unusual woman might have actually operated out of personal theological integrity. An historian may not like the religion Elizabeth promulgated, but he may not, without reference to the available facts, heedlessly cast doubt upon her religious integrity. (As a Baptist, this historian certainly does not like parts of her theology, but one must respect a person before criticizing her.) My hope for the theologians reading this essay is that we will develop an appreciation for this woman's powerful, critical, and subtle mind.

Elizabeth's Foundational Theology

One of the necessities in writing historical theology is discerning a paradigm by which to present the theology of a person or movement located in history. Out of respect for Rankean historiography—seeking "only to show what actually happened,"²⁹ and respect for the academic discipline known variously as "prolegomena," "*Fundamentaltheologie*," "development of doctrine," or perhaps best "foundational theology," it seems appropriate to discover the foundation from which Elizabeth developed her theological views.³⁰ Foundational theology is useful because it seeks to define the bases from which the rest of a theology develops.

Three theological concepts, each of which reflects upon authority, are generally conceived as constitutive of any foundation: philosophy of revelation, soteriology, and ecclesiology. By identifying the particular construal of those three concepts through the careful reading of a theologian's own thought, one may perhaps approach the central thrust of a figure's theology.

Power," *Signs* 1.1 (1975): 35, 36.

²⁸One might infer personal impiety from a maid of honor attending Elizabeth at her death. Elizabeth Southwell was a convert to Catholicism who freely weaved magic with medicine and theology. Southwell's manuscript contradicts the majority of reports concerning her deathbed conversations with her prelates. Catherine Loomis, "Elizabeth Southwell's Manuscript Account of the Death of Queen Elizabeth," *English Literary Renaissance* 26.3 (1996): 483, 486, 491.

²⁹Cf. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 256–63.

³⁰The discipline of *Fundamentaltheologie* had its beginnings in the continental Catholic faculties of the nineteenth century and reached its height with a practitioner who recently sat in the chair of Peter. On the theological method of Benedict XVI, see Malcolm B. Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 34–42.

Foundational theology from a historical and systematic perspective may be conveniently divided into two large questions, that of theological foundation and that of doctrinal development.

What was the basic worldview from which Elizabeth learned to think about God in his relation to humanity? What was her *Fundamentaltheologie*? What was her view of the development of doctrine? What did she consider authoritative in theological construction? Was there a particular philosophical paradigm from which she operated? What are the ethical principles that drove her political and ecclesiological conclusions? From an academic perspective, a theological foundation should not be imposed upon an historical figure but derived from her thoughts. What follows is an attempt to define the theological method of Elizabeth I on the basis of her own statements and actions, rather than imposing an alien paradigm upon her.

Elizabeth as Evangelical

It has been claimed that Elizabeth's fundamental religion was "evangelical," being "a religion bibliocentric, Christocentric."³¹ Certainly, Elizabeth was evangelical in her convictions, rather than Catholic, when the term "evangelical" is taken in its humanistic, pre-Protestant sense.³² As she explained to Katherine Parr, in the cover letter to her translation of *The Mirror or Glass of the Sinful Soul*, "she (beholding and contemplating what she is) doth perceive of herself and of her own strength she can do nothing that good is or prevaieth for her salvation, unless it be through the grace of God, whose mother, daughter, sister, and wife by the scriptures she proveth herself to be." The reference to the church's mediatorial role through its priesthood and sacraments is striking by its absence, in the preface as in the book.

Moreover, the medieval sense of salvation as involving a semi-Pelagian *facere quod in se est*, "doing what is in oneself," as a precondition to receiving divine grace, is entirely missing. Salvation for the young Elizabeth is entirely by grace through faith: "Trusting also that through his incomprehensible love, grace, and mercy she (being called from sin to repentance) doth faithfully hope to be saved."³³ Subsequently, the ideas of personal sin and utter dependence upon divine grace for personal salvation are repeatedly encountered in her prayers and speeches. Take, for instance, this glancing statement in a speech to parliament in 1586, important precisely because it was

³¹Collinson, *Elizabeth I*, 10.

³²"Evangelicalism' is the religious outlook which makes the primary point of Christian reference the Good News of the *Evangelion*, or the text of scripture generally; it is a conveniently vague catch-all term which can be applied across the board, except to the very small minority of English religious rebels who proceeded further towards Continental radicalism." Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

³³Elizabeth to Katherine Parr, 31 December 1544, in *Elizabeth's Glass: With "The Glass of the Sinful Soul" (1544) by Elizabeth I, and "Epistle Dedicatory" & "Conclusion" (1548) by John Bale*, ed. Marc Shell (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 111–12.

haphazardly thrown into a seemingly unrelated discussion regarding, of all things, the succession: “Although I may not justify, but may justly condemn my sundry faults and sins to God.”³⁴ Elizabeth understood intimately the doctrines of creation, the Fall, and justification.

Then again, consider this prayer, written originally in Italian and published in 1569, “My God and my Lord, humbly and with a soul full of infinite displeasure at having offended Thee and offended Thee all day long, I, Thy humble handmaid and sinner, present myself before Thy divine majesty to confess my sins candidly and freely to ask pardon of Thee.” Further, “On the other side, Thou hast planted, by Thy infinite mercy, a lively faith in my heart that Christ is my true and certain Salvation, and that through Him every soul washed in His blood will be received of Thy mercy. Behold, I come with assurance and certain faith to find pardon at the judgment seat of Thy mercy through the same Jesus Christ.”³⁵

Like other evangelicals, Elizabeth also revered the Bible as God’s Word. During her passage through London prior to her coronation, she received the Bible “at the little conduit in cheape. For when her grace had learned that the Byble in Englishe should there be offered, she thanked the citie therefore, promised the reading thereof most diligentlie.” She then, to the evangelical crowd’s delight, took the Bible and kissed it before holding it to her breast.³⁶ Of course, Elizabeth did not care for convoluted and distressing arguments about what the Word meant, beyond the evangelical doctrines generally acceptable to all Protestants. She especially disdained the dissensions that arose among the people when their private interpretations endangered her royal supremacy. The Bible was best interpreted through the homilies issued by authority under Edward VI and herself.³⁷

Elizabeth was not only an evangelical in the sense of defining faith as the passive reception of divine grace and in respect for God’s Word, but in the sense of promoting the gospel. She thanked God for, “aboue all this, making me (though a weake woman) yet thy instrument, to set forth the glorious Gospel of thy deare Sonne Christ Ihesus.”³⁸ Part of her task in setting forth the gospel was to protect it from attack by hostile Catholic forces. She said that her attempt to unite European Protestants was driven by her concern that the enemy wished to rout out “such as profess the gospel.”³⁹ From birth to death, Elizabeth’s convictions were consistently evangelical in the sense of relying upon grace through faith in Christ for personal salvation and in displaying a passion for preserving and proclaiming the Word.

³⁴*ECW*, 202.

³⁵*ECW*, 152–53; *ACFLO*, 138–39.

³⁶*The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth through the citie of Lond to Westminster the daye before her coronacion* (London, 1558).

³⁷Speech to Clergy (27 February 1585), in *ECW*, 178, 181.

³⁸*ACFLO*, 45. Cf. *ECW*, 311–13. See the note regarding the dispute over this text’s assignment to Elizabeth *ACFLO*, 44n.

³⁹Elizabeth to Robert Beale (21 August 1577); in Doran, “Elizabeth I’s Religion,” 708.

Theocentric Providence as Theological Foundation

Yet Elizabeth's evangelical convictions are of a particular type. From the weight of references in her speeches, letters, and prayers, there should be little doubt that she referred overwhelmingly to divine providence more than to any other potential foundational Christian doctrine. Although in her prayers she affirmed the Trinity and the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, as well as the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit,⁴⁰ she most often referred to the providence of God the Father. The Son and the Spirit certainly share in the one deity and receive common glory, but the Father, with his title of "God" and in his leading role of guiding history, is referred to more often than the other persons of the Trinity. This suggests Elizabeth was "theocentric" rather than "Christocentric," looking not only to salvation by grace but also to the order of creation and her appointment within it.

Keith Thomas considered the doctrine of providence central in the development of the early modern mind.⁴¹ Alexandra Walsham deepened our knowledge in this area, indicating providence was considered one of "the first principles of Religion" by John Calvin, Zacharius Ursinus, and William Pemble, among many other Reformed theologians.⁴² The doctrine of providence was "a prominent theme" in both "academic theology and practical divinity."⁴³

However, providence was construed in different ways. Ronald J. VanderMolen shows how providence was treated in the theologies of John Calvin, representing the continental Reformed; of George Hakewill, representing the "Anglicans"; and, of Thomas Beard, representing the Puritans. Calvin, displaying caution, preserved the uniqueness of special revelation by downplaying historical speculations regarding divine providence. Hakewill read more authority into the interpretation of history as the display of providence but retained some sense of mystery in discerning all its ways. Hakewill wrote in order to undergird simultaneously English nationalism and religious conformity. The Hakewill brand of providence was also intended to bring personal comfort. The Puritan Beard, however, turned providence into a means of direct revelation, forsaking almost any sense of the mystery of providence. Through the moral judgments of history, Beard emphasized the evil nature of tyranny. Beard's doctrine of providence encouraged social and religious change.⁴⁴

⁴⁰E.g. a Latin prayer, organized in a Trinitarian format, with lengthy addresses to the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. *ACFLO*, 49–50; *ECW*, 317–18.

⁴¹Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, ch. 4.

⁴²William Pemble, *A Treatise of the Providence of God*, in *The Workes of William Pemble* (1635), 261; cited in Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

⁴³Pemble, *A Treatise of the Providence of God*, 9.

⁴⁴Ronald J. VanderMolen, "Providence as Mystery, Providence as Revelation: Puritan and Anglican Modifications of John Calvin's Doctrine of Providence," *Church History* 47.1 (1978): 27–47.

Elizabeth's own treatment of providence echoes the picture that VanderMolen drew of the Anglican theologian, Hakewill. Providence is discernible in the public sphere of the nation and in the private spheres of its people, but it necessarily retains a certain aspect of incomprehensibility. She was careful when stating the case for providence, for instance with regard to her own blessings: "I cannot attribute this hap and good success to my device without detracting much from the divine Providence, nor challenge to my own commendation what is due to His eternal glory."⁴⁵

After the plotting of Mary Stuart was exposed, she told Parliament, "When I remember the bottomless depth of God's great benefits towards me, I find them to be so many or rather so infinite in themselves as that they exceed the capacity of all men, much more of any one, to be comprehended."⁴⁶ Elizabeth's reserve contained a subtle warning: Ascribing too much to providence is a sign of human pride.

Yet providence is nonetheless discernible, entire, and comforting. For Elizabeth, providence arranged her entire life. In her first speech before Parliament in 1559, she noted she was "born a servitor of almighty God."⁴⁷ In a prayer delivered at Bristol in 1574, Elizabeth thanked God for providentially guiding every aspect of her life: "my creation, preservation, regeneration, and all other Thy benefits." God protected and preserved her "from the beginning of my life unto this present hour," and she desired to return to God what she had received from him in her life. Specifically, she referred to "the government of this Church and kingdom," and expressed her hope to return to God "a peaceable, quiet, and well-ordered state and kingdom, as also a perfect reformed Church."

Elizabeth considered her entire life destiny to be for the furthering of God's glory, and was willing to accept from him whatever he providentially allotted.⁴⁸ In that swan song delivered to the Commons in 1601, known as the "Golden Speech," she pictured God ruling her life from her accession to her impending death. She kept the account she would have to give God at the final judgment always before her, believing she would be judged on the basis of how she fulfilled her "kingly duty."⁴⁹

Providence brought Elizabeth comfort. Whenever she reflected upon her life, whether in private prayer or in public parliament, she drew strength from the fact that her entire history was in God's hands. She reminded a Parliament nervous for the succession that God's provision for her and her nation "may be made in convenient time."⁵⁰ She prayed, "*Omnipotens, aeternus deus, Dominus dominantium, Rex regum, a quo omnis potestas, qui me tui populi principem constituisti, ac ex sola tua misericordia sedere fecisti in throno patris*

⁴⁵Speech before Convocation (15 March 1576), in *ECW*, 168.

⁴⁶Speech before Parliament (12 November 1586), first version, in *ECW*, 186.

⁴⁷*ECW*, 56.

⁴⁸Prayer at Bristol (15 August 1574), in *ECW*, 310–11.

⁴⁹The Golden Speech (30 November 1601) [two versions], in *ECW*, 339, 341–42.

⁵⁰Speech before Parliament (10 February 1559), in *ECW*, 58.

mei.”⁵¹ “All-powerful, eternal God, Lord of lords, King of kings, to whom belongs all power, who has constituted me ruler of your people, and who by your mercy alone made me to sit in my father’s throne.”

The comfort of providence appeared again, when she gave Parliament an answerless answer regarding Mary’s execution: “And yet must I needs confess that the benefits of God to me have been and are so manifold, so folded and embroidered upon one another, so doubled and redoubled towards me, as that no creature living hath more cause to thank God for all things than I have.”⁵²

While the benefits of her life were due to divine providence, she also drew comfort from the fact that even death was due to divine providence. “Wherein as I would loath to die so bloody a death, so doubt I not but God would have given me grace to be prepared for such an event, chance when it shall, which I refer to His good pleasure.”⁵³ God shows his care in the giving of life and its blessings, even of death.

Exercising a cure of souls, she reminded a number of her noble subjects that the deaths of favored sons were thankfully due to God’s provision. For instance, she consoled her ambassador to France, when she learned that “God of late hath called your son to His mercy.” At first, she was “inwardly sorry,” “But seeing it was the good pleasure of God that he should no longer tarry in this world, being meeter for heaven than earth, it is our part and yours also to refer all things to His holy will.” Or, as she comforted the Earl of Shrewsbury, regarding his son’s death, “how well God in His singular goodness hath dealt with you, in that he left you behind other sons of great hope.” “[Y]ou are to remember that of four sons that He hath given you, He hath taken only one to Himself.” Or, to Lady Norris upon her son’s death, “let that Christian discretion stay the flux of your immoderate grieving [for] nothing of this kind hath happened but by God’s divine providence.”

From a modern counseling viewpoint, these applications of providence may seem cold, even callous, but Elizabeth was genuine and caring in her sentiments. She comforted herself in similar terms upon Leicester’s death.⁵⁴ The queen grounded her ways of thought and action upon a theocentric doctrine of divine providence.

The Order of “The Middle Way”

Although providence is all-encompassing, discernible, and comforting, there is a limit to human speculation regarding this mystery. Books 4 and 5 of Elizabeth’s “Englishing” of Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae* treat

⁵¹*Precationes priuate. Regiae E.R.* (London, 1563); reprinted in *ACFLO*, 118.

⁵²Speech before Parliament (12 November 1586), first version, in *ECW*, 188.

⁵³Speech before Parliament (12 November 1586), second version, in *ECW*, 193.

⁵⁴Elizabeth to Amyas Paulet (January 1579), Elizabeth to George Talbot (5 September 1582), and Elizabeth to Margery Norris (22 September 1597), in *ECW*, 231, 257, 389; Doran, “Elizabeth I’s Religion,” 715–16.

the subject at length. It should be kept in mind that the Reformed found the ruminations of Boethius antithetical to a proper doctrine of providence.⁵⁵ But Elizabeth had a different view. In those books, she considers the philosophical problems of theodicy, of relating providence to fate and luck, and of relating divine foreknowledge to divine predestination and free will to determinism.

As for the first problem, that of theodicy, answering why God allows the righteous to suffer, she concluded that God will finally prosper the good and punish the wicked, but understanding his temporal judgments is ultimately “unknowen.” “But thou, although thou knowest not the cause of so greate an order, yet because a good guyder the world tempers, doubtte thou not all thinges rightly orderd be.”⁵⁶

As for the second problem, she sees fate and luck, or destiny and chance, as human descriptions of problems which find their unity in divine providence. “For Prouidence is Godes pleasure, appoynted by him that all rutilh & all disposith.” Lesser beings concern themselves with the microcosmic problems of their divided fates and destinies, seeking to influence outcomes by exercising their own wills.

The Elizabethan worldview is partially discerned in the idea of moving and interconnecting spheres, circles, or wheels, finally bounded by God and properly centered by cooperation with providence.⁵⁷ “For as of all Circles the inmost that turnes themselves about one rounde, coms neerest to the purenes of the midst, and as a stedy stay of all that rolles about, doth circuite the same, but the vttmost by wyder bredth rolled, the more hit goes from the vndeuided midst of the poynte, so much the more hit is spred by larger spaces, but whatsoeuer drawith neere & accompanith the midst, & with his pureness is ruled, ceassith to be stopt or ouerrun.”⁵⁸

The concepts of “order” and “rashness” are also key to Elizabeth’s worldview. God oversees all of history, putting all things in their proper order. He possesses a vision unavailable to created beings, so that events often seem confused rather than ordered to us. It is best to submit to providence, draw close to his will, and allow oneself to be properly placed. However, some human beings seek to change their fortune and overturn the ways of providence. Others err by attempting to comprehend providence, but “peruers is the confusion of opinion her self.”⁵⁹ However, God guides the lives of men in diverse ways, providing further opportunity for confusion.

Divine order determines the way things should be; human rashness seeks to unsettle it. “For order keeps ech thing, so as what so doth leave his assigned way of order, the self same tho it hap to an other, falles in rule, lest

⁵⁵Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 21–22.

⁵⁶*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 90.

⁵⁷E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943; reprinted, New York: Pelican, 1972).

⁵⁸*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 92–93.

⁵⁹*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 94.

in Providences kingdom, Rashnes should prevayle.”⁶⁰ Rather than changing fortune or comprehending providence, human beings serve themselves better by cooperating with providence. Such cooperation is usually found in love and in “the middle way.”

Regarding the middle way, Elizabeth allows her persona to speak as the goddess of philosophy, “For you cam not to vs in the aduancement of vertue, to make vs ouerflow with delites, or drownd in pleasure, but that we should make a sharp battell against all fortune, and that neyther the sowre oppresse yow, nor pleasant corrupt you; the middle waye with stedly force maynteyne you.” It is a virtue to submit to providence, which is found in steadily holding to the middle way between opposing errors. Elizabeth’s worldview gives explanatory power to why she was so adamant against changes in the religious formulae legislated in 1559, a settlement reflecting her own upbringing.

Perhaps she altered the *Book of Common Prayer* in the ways she did in 1559 so that she might reclaim the sense of profound religiosity she most likely first discovered in the early part of Edward’s reign. There, with Henry’s terrible presence removed, and with her younger brother, her “*Serenissimo Regi*,”⁶¹ on the throne, she found peace in her chapel, where the Lutheran-leaning Edmund Allen was her priest. The 1544 *Litany* approved by her father, and the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* containing Thomas Cranmer’s lyrical prayers, would certainly look like a golden age to her during the trials of the following years.

It will also be remembered that the first major crisis in her young adult life occurred in 1549 with the Privy Council’s examination of her dealings with Thomas Seymour. She went from signing her letters to the Lord Protector, “my power,” to the more humble, “my little power.”⁶² Having survived that frightening spiritual and political ordeal, she turned inward, finding solace in her religion, renewing her focus upon theology and the classics. In a prayer from her imprisonment in the Tower under Mary, she cried out, “Help me now, O God, for I have none other friends but Thee alone. And suffer me not (I beseech Thee) build my foundation upon the sands, but upon the rock, whereby all the blasts of blustering weather may have no power against me, amen.”⁶³

The 1552 revision of the prayer book came forth about the time Edward began to fall ill. In “My device for the succession,” Edward indicated that a woman could only play a “transmissory role” in the succession, rather than a receptive role.⁶⁴ Moreover, the evangelical bishops influential in its revision and dissemination demonstrated their prejudice against a woman, principally Mary but tangentially Elizabeth, sitting upon the throne. Nicholas Ridley,

⁶⁰*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 96.

⁶¹Elizabeth to Edward VI (1548), in *ACFLO*, 18.

⁶²Starkey, *Elizabeth I*, 65–75; Elizabeth to Edward Seymour (September 1548) and Elizabeth to Edward Seymour (28 January 1548), in *ECW*, 22, 24.

⁶³Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrons* (London, 1582), 35–36; in *ECW*, 48.

⁶⁴Starkey, *Elizabeth I*, 110–11.

the bishop of London, declared publicly that Mary and Elizabeth were “illegitimate and not lawfully begotten in the estate of true matrimony according to God’s law.” Elizabeth recalled this traumatic event years later, when she reminded the “*Domini Doctores*” that they had proclaimed her and her sister “bastards.”⁶⁵

When Mary came to the throne, Elizabeth temporized her outward worship in order to comply with Mary’s demands. During her imprisonment at Woodstock, she had asked for the English Bible. Displaying her belief in conformity coupled with a tolerance for conscientious but conforming Nicodemism, Elizabeth worshiped according to the Catholic forms. However, she continued to use the English *Litany* approved by Henry. Mary demanded that she switch to Latin prayers. Elizabeth, again, conformed, but only after defending her use of the *Litany* because of its petitions for “mercy upon us miserable sinners” and its approval by Henry VIII.⁶⁶ Elizabeth’s appreciation for the *Litany* surfaced again in 1558, when she approved its use in both the Chapel Royal and in the nation’s churches prior to Parliament’s official passage of the Act of Uniformity.⁶⁷

The order of religion from the central part of Edward’s reign thus seems to provide a center upon which Elizabeth’s personal religious sense could rest. And since she believed in the “middle way,” which “steddy force” should “maynteyne”—and certainly her father’s late religion and her brother’s early religion were midway between Edward’s strident Reformism and Mary’s persecuting Catholicism—there was little need for further development in her religious doctrine. Her worldview simply would not allow it, for God had providentially determined the way things were to be, and it is best to cooperate with them; the circles of life cannot move far from their set course anyways, and the rashness of change is in reality sin against God.

Elizabeth’s stasis of life and doctrine in a “middle way” brought no end of consternation to her Puritan subjects as much as to her Catholic subjects. If they had listened to her closely, they would have realized that her doctrine of providence discountenanced both a return to Rome and a radical reformation in the arenas of church polity and church doctrine. She might speak of tradition and reformation, but she was determined that the church should never move far from the center point previously established by divinely-ordained authority.

Elizabeth’s Sacred Office

Divine providence taught that God also utilized “instruments” or “second causes” by which to bring about his will in history. This brought a certain

⁶⁵Starkey, *Elizabeth I*, 117; Speech to Parliamentary Delegation (5 November 1566), in *ECW*, 97.

⁶⁶Starkey, *Elizabeth I*, 162–63.

⁶⁷Bowers, “The Chapel Royal,” 323–25; *A booke containing all such proclamations as were published during the raigene of the late Queene Elizabeth* (London, 1618), fol. 3.

dignity to his creatures, but our English divine also noted this did not grant the instrument some type of mystical divinity.⁶⁸ Elizabeth definitely believed she was “His instrument to preserve” the people.⁶⁹ Elizabeth was a divinely-ordained monarch above the nation and a humbly submissive handmaid under God.

In a Spanish prayer, she identified herself as “an instrument of Thy glory, an instrument with which Thou mayst be glorified in constituting me as head and governess of Thy wealthiest kingdom in these most unhappy times in which Thy Church, Thy only spouse, is in so great a manner oppressed by the tyranny of Satan and his ministers.”⁷⁰ Because she was an instrument of God, she was due obedience. The identification of her instrumentality with the Creator could appear quite strong. In one prayer, she implied that to fail to obey God was to fail to obey her. Moreover, upon her death, her kingdom would become the kingdom of heaven.⁷¹

The exact relationship between Elizabeth and God might appear ambiguous to the unwary, but Elizabeth was always careful to state she was a creature and a sinful one at that. Her position was definitely due to God, who has “miraculously set me up in this kingdom.”⁷² Her rule was the result of her elevation within the church “*par ta providence admirable*.”⁷³ Her favorite designation for herself seemed to be that of a divine “handmaid.” For instance, “Thou art the King of heaven and earth, King of kings. O King, may I Thy handmaid and Thy universal people committed to me be readied by Thy grace in all things to proclaim Thy glory and to acknowledge Thy supreme sovereignty, through Jesus Christ, amen.”⁷⁴

And yet, there were times she could ascend to the dizzying heights of apotheosis. The Golden Speech was such an affair. Sir John Croke addressed her in a flurry of divine analogies. The word “sacred” was used at least five times, and Croke admitted he was ascribing to her divine attributes and activity. His language mirrored that of a worshipper praying for access to a deity in her temple: She has granted the Commons “access to your sacred presence.” “[W]e acknowledge your sacred ears are ever open and ever bowed down to us.” “[W]e acknowledge that before we call, your preventing grace and all-deserving goodness doth watch over us for our good.” He ended by bowing three times before his “sacred sovereign.”⁷⁵

⁶⁸Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 12–13.

⁶⁹Speech to Parliament (30 November 1601), in *ECW*, 337. Cf. Speech to Parliament (19 December 1601), in *ECW*, 348.

⁷⁰Spanish Prayer, in *ECW*, 156; *ACFLO*, 142.

⁷¹Greek Prayer, in *ECW*, 163; *ACFLO*, 149.

⁷²Private Prayer of 1563, in *ECW*, 137.

⁷³French Prayer of 1569, in *ECW*, 145; *ACFLO*, 131.

⁷⁴Private Prayer of 1563, in *ECW*, 136.

⁷⁵Croke’s Speech to Elizabeth (30 November 1601), in *ECW*, 336.

Elizabeth, playing along, received such flattery as an acceptable “sacrifice;” however, she did not allow herself to be overwhelmed for long.⁷⁶ “For myself, I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king or royal authority of a queen as delighted that God had made me His instrument to maintain His truth and glory.” “But to God only and wholly, all is to be given and ascribed.”⁷⁷ Elizabeth was merely a handmaid, but more than any mere handmaid, she was providentially ordained to rule. In her letter to her father, Elizabeth noted that Henry was “a king, whom philosophers regard as a god on earth.”⁷⁸

And the philosopher she translated, Boethius, began his consolation with the divine figure of philosophy. Philosophy was a woman “of stately face, with flaming yees, of insight about the comun worth of men; of fresche coulour and unwon strength, thogh yet so old she wer, that of our age she seemed not be one; her stature such as skarse could be desernd.” For a time she appeared to walk the earth, but “strait she semed with croune of hed the heauens to strike, and lifting vp the same hiar, the heauens them selues she enterd, begiling the sight of lookars on.”⁷⁹

Her Englishing of Boethius may have been prompted by the tribute Elizabeth received from Sir Henry Lee, the retired master of the royal pageants, only the year before in Ditchley. The larger-than-life Ditchley portrait, by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, now in London’s National Portrait Gallery, portrays Elizabeth striding above the provinces of England, feet squarely planted upon Oxfordshire. On both sides of her head, the clouds in the heavens indicate either peace or wrath. The inscriptions hint of her grace, her mercy, and her magnanimity. The fragmented sonnet concerns the “prince of light” who rules. The celestial sphere she wears as an earring reminds Roy Strong of the genre of the sphere with the world resting upon the Word of God.⁸⁰ It reminds me of the spheres in Boethius. In the Ditchley portrait, Elizabeth holds a fan and gloves; in Boethius, philosophy holds a “booke” and a “sceptar,” a memento that philosophy is also a queen.⁸¹

The queen of light of 1592 and the philosopher queen of 1593 unite earth with heaven. The medieval coronation ceremony accomplished much the same. Unfortunately, we do not possess the actual rubrics used in the late Tudor ceremonies, but there are a number of accounts, especially for that of Elizabeth. At the coronation of Edward, Cranmer referred to him as “God’s Vicegerent, and Christ’s Vicar within your own Dominion.” Cranmer denied the physical anointing accomplished anything; rather, a king’s

⁷⁶The Golden Speech (30 November 1601), third version, in *ECW*, 343.

⁷⁷The Golden Speech (30 November 1601), second version, in *ECW*, 342.

⁷⁸Elizabeth to Henry VIII (30 December 1545), in *ECW*, 9.

⁷⁹*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 2–3.

⁸⁰Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Pimlico, 1987), 135–41.

⁸¹*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 3.

anointing came directly from God. As a result, “any bishop may perform this ceremony.”⁸²

Edward was also named a second Josiah. Both before and after her coronation, Elizabeth was deemed “the worthy Deborah as iudge among them sent,” and “a very Debora, to execute justice, equity, and truth.”⁸³ In a Spanish prayer, Elizabeth compared herself, not only with Deborah, but with Judith and Esther, too.⁸⁴ Whether king, prophet, or priest, the biblical model called for the visible anointing of one sanctified to God. The monarch literally became a Christ, an “anointed one.”

According to Edward Smith, her coronation ceremony’s “liturgical actions and formulae were intended to place the monarch ever more closely to the center point where the terrestrial and the celestial converge. The cosmic activity of the Spirit was channeled toward the prince.”⁸⁵ The sacred nature of the coronation is no doubt true for the medieval *ordines* as understood by canon law, civil law, and common law. Moreover, the high elevation of the throne constructed for Elizabeth would certainly have fostered a sense of deification in Westminster Abbey.⁸⁶

However, Richard McCoy and Roy Strong correctly note a shift beginning with Edward’s coronation. The theology of the Reformation, with its emphasis on salvation by faith replacing the medieval efficacy of sacramentalism, resulted in the monarchy becoming “desacralised.”⁸⁷ This “demystification” took some time to realize, and both the Tudors and the Stuarts did everything possible to retain the ethos of hierarchical order that was part and parcel of the medieval worldview, especially as it pertained to the sacred monarchy, even while they embraced the new doctrines undermining it.⁸⁸

The shift in understandings is evident in Elizabeth’s own coronation, although she was probably unaware of the import of that shift with regard to political ethos. On the one hand, Elizabeth refused to participate in the

⁸²Thomas Cranmer, “The Archbishop’s Speech at the Coronation of Edward VI,” in *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 126–27.

⁸³*The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth*, John Prime (1585); cited in Alexandra Walsham, “A Very Deborah? The Myth of Elizabeth I as a Providential Monarch,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (London: Macmillan, 2003), 145; John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 223–41.

⁸⁴Spanish Prayer of 1569, in *ECW*, 157.

⁸⁵Edward O. Smith, Jr., “Crown and Commonwealth: A Study in the Official Elizabethan Doctrine of the Prince,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 66.8 (1976): 14.

⁸⁶Roy Strong, *Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 211.

⁸⁷Richard C. McCoy, “‘The Wonderfull Spectacle’: The Civic Progress of Elizabeth I and the Troublesome Coronation,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. Janos M. Bak (Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 217–23; Strong, *Coronation*, 228.

⁸⁸McCoy, “‘The Wonderfull Spectacle,’” 231.

elevation of the mass, for she rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation it represented. She also apparently wanted to receive the elements in both kinds. The reports conflict as to which type of Eucharist was celebrated: mass or communion. Haugaard believes she concocted a ceremony that would satisfy the consciences of all the participants.⁸⁹ According to McCoy, Elizabeth solved her religious dilemma by confusing the actual coronation ceremony at the critical point of the mass and played to her strength by shifting attention away from the relatively private coronation proper toward the public pageantry.⁹⁰

On the basis of her understanding of the predominant position accorded to her by God, Elizabeth worked out various principles that enabled her to lead the nation. The sacred monarchy entailed three political principles. These principles concerned a proper ordering, the proper means of bonding, and the way to bring the people to believe in and serve God. They may be described systematically as a Christological political theology, a Pneumatological political theology, and a Pastoral theology.

Elizabeth's Christological Political Theology

The Christ-likeness of the monarch created room for medieval and early modern speculation regarding the monarch's two bodies, a political theology utilized even by Elizabethan common lawyers and ably explored in the classic work by Ernst Kantorowicz.⁹¹ Elizabeth herself affirmed the conception of the two bodies. Her communications with Mary were submissive yet dangerous. On the one hand, she noted that only "devilish" Christians rebel against "their oincted king."⁹² On the other hand, she subtly reminded Queen Mary of the two bodies doctrine: "I never practiced, counseled, nor consented to anything that might be prejudicial to your person any way or dangerous to the state by any mean."⁹³ At Hatfield, she told the assembled lords, "I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern."⁹⁴

⁸⁹The scholarly debate over exactly how Elizabeth's coronation service was conducted is itself a convoluted subject, due to the various eyewitness accounts. C.G. Bayne, "The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth," *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 650–73; H.A. Wilson, "The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth," *English Historical Review* 23 (1908): 87–91; G. Lockhart Ross, "Il Schifanoja's Account of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth," *English Historical Review* 23 (1908): 533–34; C.G. Bayne, "The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth," *English Historical Review* 24 (1909): 322–23; A.F. Pollard, *English Historical Review* 25 (1910): 125–26; C.G. Bayne, "The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth," *English Historical Review* 25 (1910): 550–53; William P. Haugaard, "The Coronation of Elizabeth I," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 19.2 (1968): 161–70.

⁹⁰McCoy, "The Wonderfull Spectacle," 222–25.

⁹¹Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).

⁹²Elizabeth to Mary I (2 August 1556), in *ECW*, 43.

⁹³Elizabeth to Mary I (16 March 1554), in *ECW*, 41.

⁹⁴Elizabeth to the Lords (20 November 1558), in *ECW*, 52.

Elizabeth also took another clue from classic Christology, the doctrine of the two wills. In her commission to William Cecil, she made a distinction between her private will and her public will. In her fourfold charge, she demanded of her leading councilor, “that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best.”⁹⁵ This distinction between the private and the public was an important one to maintain in the early modern period. It set limits upon one’s ability to speak freely to an issue. Private persons were restricted in their ability to act, but the monarch was the public person *extraordinaire*. This was both a blessing and a danger for the monarch. In Elizabeth’s case, she recognized that whatever her personal feelings regarding marriage, she had a public office to fulfill. “For though I can think it best for a private woman, yet do I strive with myself to think it not meet for a prince.” She informed the House of Lords they must put out of their mind the “heresy” that she could act as anything but a public woman, especially with regard to marriage.⁹⁶ Like Jesus, the anointed one, Elizabeth’s private human will must submit to her divinely-given public will.

But other persons could not claim such a Christological anointing from God that resulted in their possessing two bodies with two wills. Even the clergy, who were also anointed, never claimed to possess two bodies with two wills, as far as I am aware. Moreover, Cranmer’s *Ordinal* of 1550 undermined the traditional understanding of priestly ordination as the granting of a sacerdotal character, replacing it with an emphasis upon the office of the clergy. The language of “priest” was retained, and the threefold order of bishop, priest, and deacon was promoted, but it is difficult to argue that the ancient sacerdotal understanding was Cranmer’s understanding.⁹⁷ As far as Elizabeth was concerned, her bishops’ consecrations would not prevent her ordering them to their tasks or deposing them if they failed in such. She could display this attitude most aggressively.

She called the clergy to appear before her during the 1584–1585 Parliament regarding attempts in the House of Commons to reform the church. She had heard that “the Nether House” were meddling “with matters above their capacity not appertaining unto them.” She indicated that she would fix the problem of “some intemperate and rash heads in that House,” and yet there were some wise men there, who had found causes of grievance with the clergy. She listed the problems she saw with the clergy, beginning with the ordination of corrupt ministers, then proceeding to the problem of men who need “to be brought to conformity and unity.”

While putting the clergy through the grinder, she came to the subject of how many educated preachers there should be. When John Whitgift, her third Archbishop of Canterbury, her “little black husband,” replied there were thirteen thousand parishes in England, Elizabeth cut him off. “Jesus!”

⁹⁵Elizabeth to William Cecil (20 November 1558), in *ECW*, 51.

⁹⁶Speech to the House of Lords (10 April 1563), in *ECW*, 79.

⁹⁷For Cranmer’s theology of priesthood, see Malcolm B. Yarnell, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

quod the queen, ‘thirteen thousand! It is not to be looked for.’” More than learned ministers, Elizabeth believed England needed honest and discerning ministers who could “read the Scriptures and Homilies well unto the people.”⁹⁸ As Haigh quipped, “She *was* bossy.”⁹⁹ Elizabeth’s willingness to dominate the church by calling her bishops to task or by suppressing the wilder sources of preaching in the prophesying movement was an attitude her second Archbishop of Canterbury famously tested and more famously failed to overcome.

Elizabeth not only considered herself ruler of the clergy, but of the laity, too. As she explained to the Lords gathered at Hatfield near the beginning of her reign, she was submitting to divine providence, for “I am God’s creature, ordained to obey His appointment.” Divine appointment and its consequent accountability extended not only to the ruler but the ruled. “I shall desire you all, my lords (chiefly you of the nobility, everyone in his degree and power), to be assistant to me, that I with my ruling and you with your service may make a good account to almighty God.”¹⁰⁰ If “princes be set their seat by God’s appointing,”¹⁰¹ then the people are also given a certain “degree and power.”

Elizabeth drew upon the tradition of hierarchy so clearly defined by Pseudo-Dionysius, whose works were considered authoritative in the Middle Ages. Elizabeth demanded that her people remember the proper ordering of society. “Kings were wont to honor philosophers, but if I had such I would honor them as angels, that should have such piety in them that they would not seek where they are the second to be the first, and where the third to be the second, and so forth.” Concluding her exhortation, she reminded the assembled representatives of the three estates of the horrors of a world turned upside down by revolt. “For it is monstrous that the feet should direct the head.”¹⁰²

In *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Elizabeth asserted that “order it self” comes from “the fountayne of prouidence, [which] disposith all in their place & tyme.”¹⁰³ In her private prayers, she placed herself under God; the “councillors” of the state and the “shepherd” of the church under herself; and finally, the people under them. Succinctly, she wrote, “Under Thy sovereignty, princes reign and all the people obey.”¹⁰⁴ Among the Greek prayers, there is this one intended to be said by the people on her behalf. “[A]nd that day by day she may continue faithfully to teach us, the people who are subject to her, remembering always that sovereign rule is not hers, but that the governance of the whole kingdom has been given to her as heir to the kingdom, or rather

⁹⁸Speech to the Clergy (27 February 1585), in *ECW*, 178.

⁹⁹Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 31.

¹⁰⁰Speech to the Lords (20 November 1558), in *ECW*, 51–52.

¹⁰¹*The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth*, Sig. Eiiii_.

¹⁰²Speech to Parliament Delegates (5 November 1566), second version, in *ECW*, 96, 98.

¹⁰³*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 103.

¹⁰⁴Private Prayer of 1563, in *ECW*, 138–39.

as servant, by Thee as sovereign, on condition that she revere Thee absolutely, defend the virtuous, and seek vengeance on the wicked and lawless.”¹⁰⁵ “The Chain of Being”—a term coined by modern scholars to describe the Dionysian hierarchies between God, angels, elements, men, and animals—was definitely held by Elizabeth.¹⁰⁶

Elizabeth’s Pneumatological Political Theology

In her work on the consolation of philosophy, Elizabeth delivers a poem that reveals much about her ethical principles. It builds on the idea of order already delineated:

The Order that now stable keeps
Disseuerd all from Spring would faynte.
Such is of common loue of all,
That with returne, for end of good be kept.
In other sorte endure they could not,
Unless agayne by loue returnd
Back to the cause them made bend.

The editor of Elizabeth’s translation noted, “This metre is in several places incorrectly translated by the Queen.”¹⁰⁷ Perhaps there is good reason, for her work of “translation” was, in 1593, likely intended to reinforce what she already believed rather than reflect an academically accurate translation. Note the emphasis on a stable order, a common love of all things, and the procession from and return to the source of all things who is also the final good, God. Moreover, the direction of love is both vertical and horizontal, directed towards creation and towards God.

The idea that love binds persons together goes back to the Trinitarian speculations of Augustine, where the person of the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the persons of the Father and the Son. In a 1563 invocation upon God to send his Spirit, Elizabeth drew upon this Augustinian tradition for binding her people to one another and herself with her people. “Send from heaven the Spirit of Thy wisdom, that He may lead me in all my doings.” Moreover, regarding her clergy, she prays, “Impart Thy Spirit to them that I may administer justice in Thy fear without acceptation of persons.” And for “all the ranks of this Thy kingdom,” she asked that they “may devote themselves to one another in charity.” Moreover, “That I myself may rule over each one of them by Thy Word in care and diligence, infuse the spirit of Thy love, by which both they to me may be joined together very straitly, and among themselves also, as members of one body.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Greek Prayer, in *ECW*, 161.

¹⁰⁶Tillyard, *The Elizabethan Worldview*, 33–90.

¹⁰⁷*Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 98 and 98n.

¹⁰⁸*ECW*, 138.

From the day before her coronation through her last speech to Parliament, she emphasized the love between her and the people over which she was granted rule. Richard Mulcaster's account of her passage is filled with displays of great affection between the queen and her people. She declared "her selfe no lesse thankfullye to receiue her peoples good wyll, than they louingly offred it vnto her." Elizabeth believed the reciprocation of love between people and monarch would ensure God's blessings. As Mulcaster reports, "This her graces louing behauior preconceiued in the peoples heades vpon these consideracions was then throughly confirmed, and in dede em- planted a wonderfull hope in them touchyng her woorthy gouernement in the reste of her reygne." Mulcaster's treatise came soon after the coronation "*cum priuilegio*," indicating the queen approved its message for wider dissemination.¹⁰⁹

A month later, she answered Parliament's petition for her to marry, by stating, "I am already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you."¹¹⁰ She said much the same to Mary Queen of Scots' ambassador in 1561, indicating her coronation ring.¹¹¹ Even when the marriage between Queen and people was rocked by distrust and fits of anger, usually when Parliament was in session and ignoring her demand that religious innovation cease, she was careful to recollect their binding love.

In 1585, after heated discussions, she boldly reminded Parliament that God had made her "ouerruler" of the church, warned the bishops that she meant to depose them if they did not fulfill their charge, and cautioned the people against using private Bible interpretation as a "veil and cover" for judging the validity and piety of her government. However, she was careful to end her exhortation by reminding them of their love for her and her care for them.¹¹²

In 1586, she interpreted the Oath of Association, even with its potential support for an interregnum government, as a sign of their love for her, binding them even closer to one another.¹¹³ In the speeches between her and the Parliament in late 1601, it was a virtual love fest. "For above all earthly treasure, I esteem my people's love, more than which I desire not to merit. And God that gave me here to sit, and set me over you, knows that I never respected myself, but as your good was concerned in me."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹*The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth, Sig. Aiiṛ.*

¹¹⁰Speech to Parliament (10 February 1559), second version, in *ECW*, 59.

¹¹¹Cited in Strong, *Coronation*, 227.

¹¹²Speech to Parliament (29 March 1585), in *ECW*, 183.

¹¹³Speech to Parliament (12 November 1586), second version, in *ECW*, 195. Cf. "[A]fter twenty-eight years reign I do not perceive any diminution of my subjects' good love and affection towards me." Speech to Parliament (12 November 1586), first version, in *ECW*, 186. Cf. "And now, as touching you, I must needs say and confess that there was never prince more bound to his people than I am to you all. I can but acknowledge your great love and exceeding care of me to be such as I shall never be able to requite." Speech to Parliament (24 November 1586), first version, in *ECW*, 198.

¹¹⁴The Golden Speech (30 November 1601), second version, in *ECW*, 341.

Elizabeth believed the monarch could hold together the various factions in her kingdom through their love for her. This was a lesson taught by her father. When he made his famous speech concerning religious divisions between “old Mumpsimus” and “newe Sumpsimus,” Henry also appealed for a return to fraternal “charity.”¹¹⁵ After the initial honeymoon between Elizabeth and her Protestant subjects, she discovered that her worst problem might not be the papists but the Puritans. “There is an Italian proverb,” she told a gathering from Parliament advocating religious reformation, “From mine enemy let me defend myself, but from a pretended friend, good Lord deliver me.”¹¹⁶

With the “Romanists” seeking her death on one side and “newfangle-ness” undermining her regime on the other, Elizabeth was assiduous to cultivate the love of the bulk of her people.¹¹⁷ Because of the bonding quality of human love, she considered “the hearts and true allegiance of our subjects” to be “the greatest riches of a kingdom.”¹¹⁸ The love she saw between herself and her people was the glue binding the kingdom. Pneumatological charity was the second religious principle of her politics.

Elizabeth’s Pastoral Theology

Providence placed Elizabeth upon her throne and providence called her to lead the people closer to God in faith and service. It will be remembered that the Act of Supremacy granted Elizabeth the title of “supreme governor” of the Church of England. Whatever the sensitivities of her Protestant and Catholic subjects, the question of her headship was never in doubt to the queen herself. Her self-proclaimed titles and self-considered duties combine to grant a picture of God’s handmaid being called to bring the people of England to God.

She prayed with the Trinity in 1563 regarding her subjects, “That I myself may rule over each one of them by Thy Word in care and diligence, infuse the spirit of Thy love.”¹¹⁹ She prayed again in 1569, in French, referring to “*ma charge*”: “And as you otherwise require among all your children zeal for your house, create grace in me to purge your people of all sects, heresies, and superstitions, to the end that the churches under my charge may profit and increase from day to day in the truth of the gospel for all justice and holiness.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵Peter Marshall, “Mumpsimus and Sumpsimus: The Intellectual Origins of a Henrician *Bon Mot*,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52.3 (2001): 512.

¹¹⁶Elizabeth to Clergy (27 February 1585), in *ECW*, 179.

¹¹⁷Speech to Parliament (29 March 1585), in *ECW*, 183.

¹¹⁸Speech in Norwich (August 1578), in *ECW*, 176.

¹¹⁹*ECW*, 138.

¹²⁰“Et d’autant que tu requirs en tous tes enfans le zele de ta maison, fay moy la grace de repurger en mon people toutes sects, heresies, et superstitions, a fin que tes Eglises soubz, ma charge profitent et accroissent de iour en iour en la verite de ton Euangile a toute iustice et saintete.” *ACFLO*, 135. Cf. *ECW*, 148–49

In an Italian prayer of the same year, she referred to the church as “*mio gregge*,” “my flock,” suggesting a pastoral role for herself.¹²¹ In a Latin prayer, she claimed that “*ministerium meo*,” “my ministry,” was to return Christ to the realm of England from which he had been “*exulantem*,” “exiled.”¹²² In a public prayer delivered in Bristol in 1574, she affirmed her stewardship of God’s church.¹²³ In a later French prayer, she referred to herself as “*Mere et nourice*,” “mother and nurse” of the children of God.¹²⁴

In a speech before Oxford University in 1592, she addressed her divinely ordained cure of souls. “For indeed, you do not have a prince who teaches you anything that ought to be contrary to a true Christian conscience. Know that I would be dead before I command you to do anything that is forbidden by the Holy Scriptures. If, indeed, I have always taken care for your bodies, shall I abandon the care of your souls [*curam . . . animarum*]? God forbid! Shall I neglect the care [*curam*] of souls, for the neglect of which my own soul [*anima*] will be judged? Far from it.” She concluded by calling upon the university not to exceed God’s law as compelled by her laws, “but to follow them.”

Elizabeth also taught a doctrine of conscience, a conscience formed correctly by the Word of God. Moreover, the conscience according to the Word of God constrained her subjects through obedience to her shepherding of the church. The key to her nation’s survival would be unity and obedience to the established hierarchy.¹²⁵ Although we may not ascribe too much to poetic license, it is also interesting that the song issued in celebration of the victory over the Spanish Armada pictured her as a priest offering a sacrifice to God.¹²⁶

The pastoral role of Elizabeth was worked out in her exercise of the royal supremacy, which included royal injunctions and royal proclamations. Although she generally left it to her bishops to address the reformation of the clergy, she could intercede when she discerned any rashness or disquiet opposing her desire for conformity and unity in religion. After her royal injunctions were hastily employed for iconoclasm at the beginning of her reign, she made it a contravening point to set up a cross and candles in the

¹²¹*ACFLO*, 141; *ECW*, 154. Cf. *ACFLO*, 146; *ECW*, 160.

¹²²*ACFLO*, 145. Cf. *ECW*, 159.

¹²³Prayer at Bristol (15 August 1574), in *ECW*, 311.

¹²⁴*ACFLO*, 46.

¹²⁵Speech to the Heads of Oxford University (28 September 1592), in *ECW*, 328.

¹²⁶Look and bow down Thine ear, O Lord.
From Thy bright sphere behold and see
Thy handmaid and Thy handiwork,
Amongst Thy priests, offering to Thee
Zeal for incense, reaching the skies;
Myself and scepter, sacrifice.

The subsequent stanzas refer to Elizabeth’s ascent into God’s temple. Song on the Armada Victory (December 1588), in *ECW*, 410–11.

Chapel Royal, to the extreme consternation of her Protestant bishops.¹²⁷ In the 1560s, she left it to Archbishop Parker to enforce his “Advertisements” regarding the use of vestments.

To the House of Commons in 1576, after further agitation, she replied that she had discussed their concerns with the bishops and “such as she thought were best disposed to reform these errors in the Church. From whom, if she shall not find some direct dealings for the reformation, then she will by her supreme authority, as with th’advice of her Council, direct them herself to amend; whereof her majesty doubteth not but her people shall see that her majesty will use that authority which she hath, to the increase of th’honor of God and to the reformation of th’abuses in the Church.”¹²⁸

In spite of her apparent pastoral rule over the church—an irregularity of which both Catholic controversialists and the hotter Protestants took note—she nonetheless placed conceptual limits upon her leadership. Apologists for the Church of England drew upon canon law’s distinction between *potestas iurisdictionis* and *potestas ordinis*. Ostensibly, the queen could exercise *potestas iurisdictionis*, by disciplining the church, but not *potestas ordinis*, by celebrating the sacraments or preaching doctrine. In “A Declaration of the Queen’s Proceedings Since Her Reign,” an unpublished set of manuscripts among Burghley’s notes containing her corrections, Elizabeth also addressed the extent and limits of her royal *potestates*. These notes were written in early 1570, soon after the northern rebellion.

Her general goal “in the ordering of our Realm and people” was “to cause them to live in the fear and service of God, and in the profession of the Christian religion.” In the process of setting “Ecclesiastical external policy,” there are certain practices that will differ from nation to nation.¹²⁹ These indifferent matters, referred to by the theologians as *adiaphora*,¹³⁰ had been given into her authority “by the laws of God and this Realm.” She appealed to the precedence of centuries, but especially of the recognition granted to her father and brother “as recognized by all the estates of the Realm.” She denied that she decided church doctrine, changed any ancient ceremony, or “the use of any function belonging to any ecclesiastical person being a minister of the

¹²⁷This activity, along with her German diplomacy and respect for Melanchthon, has led some to wonder whether Elizabeth possessed Lutheran sentiments. Hirofumi Horie, “The Lutheran Influence on the Elizabethan Settlement, 1558–1563,” *The Historical Journal* 34.3 (1991): 519–37; Schofield, *Philip Melanchthon and the English Reformation*, 203–04.

¹²⁸Elizabeth to the House of Commons (March 1576), in *ECW*, 174.

¹²⁹*Queen Elizabeth’s Defence of her Proceedings in Church and State*, ed. William Edward Collins (London: SPCK, 1958), 44.

¹³⁰On the source of the conception of *adiaphora* and the different ways in which theologians treated it, see Thomas F. Mayer, “Starkey and Melanchthon on *Adiaphora*: A Critique of W. Gordon Zeeveld,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 11.1 (1980): 39–50. Mayer believes Thomas Starkey treated *adiaphora* as determinable by the government, while the early Reformers spoke of them as free and unfixed matters. My own reading of Melanchthon’s revisions of the *Loci Communes* is that he moved towards Starkey’s position.

Word and Sacraments.”¹³¹ Her power was restricted to directing the estates to live as Christians, to enforcing the laws, and to ensuring the clergy were properly governed by the episcopate.¹³²

There exists no record that Elizabeth dispensed the sacraments, and the argument that she changed ceremonies continues unabated. However, she most certainly did participate in the deciding of doctrine. She was influential in steering the revision of the thirty-eight confessional articles approved in the 1563 convocation away from an anti-Lutheran bias, especially with regard to the Lutheran teachings on “the corporeal presence, the *communicatio infidelium* and the ubiquity.”¹³³ And when she discovered that Whitgift approved the Calvinistic Lambeth Articles, she reacted immediately. Through Robert Cecil, she informed the Archbishop that “she misliked much that any allowance had been given by his Grace and the rest, of any such points to be disputed: being a matter tender and dangerous to weak ignorant minds. And thereupon she required his Grace to suspend them.”¹³⁴

Elizabeth had two problems with the Lambeth Articles: First, Whitgift and his colleagues were acting without proper authority from Crown and Parliament. Second, the strong predestinarianism of the Lambeth Articles was debatable, even dangerous. Having worked through these matters as recently as 1593 with Boethius, she felt competent to arrive at that theological conclusion, a conclusion that contradicted university and ecclesiastical Calvinism, on her own.¹³⁵

Elizabeth did not like doctrinal novelty, nor did she care for doctrinal extremism. As Doran discovered, she preferred a broad Protestant definition that allowed for national unity and international cooperation among Protestants.¹³⁶ Her view of the real presence, a controverted subject in its own right, was probably because she believed it an indifferent matter. As she indicated to William Maitland in 1561, “but as in the sacrament of the altar some thinks a thing, some other, whose judgment is best God knows. In the meantime, *unusquisque in sensu suo abundant*,” [“let each one fulfill his own sense”].¹³⁷ For Elizabeth, some matters, such as whether there was a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, were to be left to the individual conscience. This is certainly supported by the addition of the 1549 rubric to that of 1552 in the presentation of the elements. Of course, one’s ability

¹³¹ *Queen Elizabeth’s Defence of Her Proceedings*, 45.

¹³² *Queen Elizabeth’s Defence of Her Proceedings*, 46.

¹³³ Horie, “The Lutheran Influence on the Elizabethan Settlement,” 531. The Thirty-Nine Articles were subsequently approved in 1571.

¹³⁴ Cecil to Whitgift (5 December 1595), in Elizabeth Gilliam, W.J. Tighe, “To ‘Run with the Time’: Archbishop Whitgift, the Lambeth Articles, and the Politics of Theological Ambiguity in Late Elizabethan England,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23.2 (1992): 328.

¹³⁵ *Queen Elizabeth’s Englishings*, 102–20.

¹³⁶ Doran, “Elizabeth I’s Religion,” 706–14, 716–18.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth to Maitland (September and October 1561), in *ECW*, 62–63.

to express one's private conscience was limited by the need to conform to proper public authority.

Elizabeth knew that working against one's conscience would bring one to judgment before God.¹³⁸ She also recognized that the conscience is best conformed to the Word of God. She was ready to appeal to Mary's conscience with regard to her suspicions of Elizabeth's treason.¹³⁹ She could speak of "liberty of conscience" concerning religious conversion, too, but only with regard to the decision of another noble in somebody else's realm.¹⁴⁰ She recognized the heavy obligations of taking an oath on the conscience.¹⁴¹ She could grant a commission of her nobles to speak their conscience freely to her for a time.¹⁴² But these were the external limits of her doctrine of freedom of conscience.

Ideally, Elizabeth, the former Nicodemite, believed her subjects could even hold to different religious opinions according to their various consciences and remain free of external coercion. However, such liberty of conscience was available only if they affirmed the general truths of the Christian faith and stayed otherwise "quiet and conformable."¹⁴³ In spite of her support for the idea of liberty of conscience, Elizabeth placed strict limits upon its practice, limits demanded by her providentially ordered world. This helps explain why she allowed her council to persecute the Jesuits and seminarians on the one hand¹⁴⁴ and personally suppressed the "prophesyings" or "exercises" on the other.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

There should be little doubt that Elizabeth I was a theologian who sought to apply her faith to everything around her. From a foundation of theocentric providence settled in a world ordered according to a "middle way," this evangelical queen developed her beliefs. Her political theology placed the divinely appointed sacred monarch at the fulcrum between God and nation. Elizabeth's divine appointment required her to enforce the existing hierarchy, to bond her people with love, and to seek the nation's religious

¹³⁸Elizabeth to Edward Seymour (28 January 1549), in *ECW*, 24. Cf. French Prayer of 1569, in *ECW*, 151.

¹³⁹Elizabeth to Mary I (16 March 1554), in *ECW*, 41.

¹⁴⁰Regarding the daughter of the Duke of Montpensier. Elizabeth to Valentine Dale (1 February 1574), in *ECW*, 223.

¹⁴¹Speech to Parliament (12 November 1586), two versions, in *ECW*, 189, 195.

¹⁴²Speech to Parliament (24 November 1586), two versions, in *ECW*, 199, 201.

¹⁴³*Queen Elizabeth's Defence of Her Proceedings*, 46–47.

¹⁴⁴Cf. William Cecil, *The Execution of Justice in England for the maintenaunce of publique and Chrisitan peace, against certeine stirrers of sedition, and adherents to the traytors and enemies of the Realme, without any persecution of them for questions of Religion, as is falsely reported and published by the fauours and fosterers of their treasons* (London, 1583).

¹⁴⁵Elizabeth to the Bishops (8 May 1577), in Claire Cross, *The Royal Supremacy in the Elizabethan Church* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), 190–92.

welfare through unity and conformity while still allowing respect for individual consciences.

On the basis of this review of the queen's own words and actions, we must permanently bury the historiographical canard that this woman was a mere *politique*, a religious oddity. Her life and writings reveal that Elizabeth Tudor was a capable, confident, and conscientious evangelical theologian. Further research into Elizabeth's theology is warranted, in both its social and personal dimensions. At a social level, by virtue of her royal tenure and famous tenacity, one might argue that her theological influence upon the post-Edwardian Church of England remains even today without peer. At a more personal level, Elizabeth I exercised a theological subtlety and strength that, shorn its social structure, will appeal to many evangelicals today, especially among our sisters.

