

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: SINNER, SOVEREIGN, AND SAINT: CALVINIST
THEOLOGY IN THE PRAYERS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I

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Elizabeth Tudor espouses a distinctly Calvinist vision of salvation throughout her prayers, emphasizing human depravity and predestination. She confesses her sins as evidence of God's grace at work within to acknowledge her sinfulness and her dependence upon His mercy to escape judgment. She traces her depravity from original sin, through the sins of her daily life, to the expectation of God's judgment. She portrays God's mercy, however, in electing her to salvation and transforming her life so that she can recognize her need for forgiveness and begin to reflect the divine image on earth. She then applies similar terms to her reign: confessing herself to be naturally weak and frail yet empowered by God to reign over England and to restore the Gospel to England. In doing so, she presents a religious and political defense of her reign framed in a distinctly Calvinist context.

Sinner, Sovereign, and Saint
Calvinist Theology in the Prayers of Queen Elizabeth I

by

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All biblical references in this essay derive from the 1540 “Great Bible” translated into English by Miles Coverdale. Biblical verses quoted in Calvin derive from the Latin Vulgate translation.

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Sinner, Sovereign & Saint: Calvinist Theology in the Prayers of Elizabeth I

Despite the dangers she faced as a Protestant queen among a majority of male and Roman Catholic princes, Elizabeth Tudor reigned over England forty-four years and established the Protestant church in England, finishing the work begun by her brother Edward VI during his short reign before Mary's restoration of Catholicism. The Queen's religious beliefs, however, have been a source of debate throughout the years. Only a handful of historians have analyzed Elizabeth's devotional writings, which include her translation of Margaret of Navarre's spiritual meditation *The Mirror or Glass of the Sinful Soul*, her translation of a chapter of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* concentrating on human depravity, and her multilingual translations of English prayers composed by her stepmother Queen Katherine Parr. As Elizabeth matured and eventually ascended the throne, these early translations influenced her own prayers, many of which were circulated or published during her lifetime as models of spiritual contemplation. Within these prayers, Elizabeth adapts theological concepts emphasized by John Calvin, particularly the doctrines of human depravity and predestination, to represent her own spiritual and political journey based upon the Protestant plan for salvation.

On the spiritual front, Elizabeth confesses to being a sinner who disobeys God in everything she does and therefore would face eternal damnation if not for God's mercy in predestining her for salvation. Like John Calvin, Elizabeth emphasizes original sin inherited from Adam (a principle common to both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology) and the way in which human depravity infects

every part of her being and aspect of her behavior, a characteristically Protestant dogma. Elizabeth departs from Catholic tradition in that she espouses the principle that salvation cannot be earned; rather, it rests solely upon God's eternal choice of whom to save. Like Calvin, she discusses predestination as God's choosing some of humanity for salvation and the rest for damnation. Whether Elizabeth believed in double predestination remains a source of debate, as is the case with so many doctrinal points. Her writings betray no difference from Calvin on human depravity and predestination. In fact, as we shall see, Calvinist rhetoric on these topics influences Elizabeth's portrayal of her spiritual development.

The terms of human depravity and predestination also frame Elizabeth's presentation of her royal duties. In this context, she describes herself as a vessel of God's mercy in that He protects her life and elevates her to the English throne for the purpose of restoring the Gospel to England. She confronts criticism that she is unfit to rule by admitting the charge, even attributing many of her natural weaknesses to her gender (as did many at the time). She overcomes these judgments, however, by casting herself as a type of the biblical David, who also had been chosen by God as king of Israel when the natural expectation would have been for one of Saul's sons to reign. She argues that she has been divinely appointed and that God overcomes her natural weaknesses just as He transforms her depraved soul. Within this framework, any dangers that she faces become evidence of God's rescue and His divine purpose at work to use Elizabeth. In return, she represents building the church as her main purpose and equates her

enemies with God's, thereby establishing her reign as the fulfillment of God's will.

The Historical Debate on Elizabeth's Personal Religious Views

Elizabeth once famously wrote to the earl of Essex: "Our lawes do not make search of man's conscience."¹ In keeping with the Protestant doctrine of predestination and emphasis on internal faith, the Queen admits that she could only establish outward conformity with her laws and left it up to God to determine what lay within her subjects' souls. Today's reader can no more peer into Elizabeth's soul than she could "search of man's conscience," and historians have been left to make suppositions based largely on her actions, drawing strikingly different conclusions. On the one end of the spectrum are those who envision a queen who harbored Catholic sympathies or did not care about religious matters, despite the Protestant theology of her religious settlement. At the other end of the spectrum are those who find Elizabeth's personal religion to align substantially with the images portrayed by Protestant iconographers like John Foxe, who treated Elizabeth as God's choice to return England to Protestantism after Mary Tudor died. Even among historians in the latter group, many have disputed any connection between the Queen and John Calvin, despite, as I will argue, the distinct Calvinist flavor of Elizabeth's rhetoric in the prayers.

Opinions as to Elizabeth's religion varied a great deal during her reign. According to Roland Bainton, one Spanish ambassador suggested that Elizabeth

¹ Elizabeth Tudor, "Elizabeth to the Earl of Sussex," June 20, 1567.

largely agreed with Catholics on the celebration of the mass.² John Knox (author of *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*), judged the Queen as follows: “And yet is she that now reigneth over [the English] neither good Protestant nor yet resolute Papist: Let the world judge which is the third.”³ Knox may have allowed the world to make a final decision, but his description of Elizabeth as a not “yet resolute papist” leaves little doubt as to where he suspected her true inclination lay. Nevertheless, the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the doctrinal statement of the English church approved by Elizabeth, described the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation as “repugnant to the plain words of scripture” and asserted that “the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the supper, only after a heavenly and scriptural manner.”⁴ It is difficult to believe that a queen who once shouted down a bishop when his sermon dragged on longer than she liked would tolerate such a definitive statement against Catholic doctrine if she truly harbored Catholic sympathies.

Queen Elizabeth could not always be counted on to support the Protestant position in ceremonial matters, however, embarrassing her more radical Protestant supporters. Her dislike for clerical marriage raised objections among her bishops, who criticized her stance as too closely resembling Catholic tradition. Still,

² Roland H. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 233.

³ John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004): vol. 1, 369.

⁴ *Articles Whereupon it was Agreed by the Archbishops and Bishops* (London, 1563), reprinted in *Religion and Modern Society: A Sourcebook*, ed. David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell (New York: Routledge, 2001). The quotation comes from Article 28: “Of the Lord’s Supper,” 67.

Elizabeth may have based her opinion on the New Testament writings of the apostle Paul: “He that is unmarried careth for the thynges that belonge to the Lorde, howe he maye please the Lorde. But he that hath maryed a wyfe careth for the thynges that are of the worlde, howe he maye please hys wyfe.”⁵ Paul does not command that everyone stay single, but he clearly favors the single life as an ideal position from which to serve God, without a husband’s concern of “howe he maye please hys wyfe.”

Many Protestants objected to Elizabeth’s preference for prescribed homilies and scriptural readings rather than “prophesyings,” a type of preaching that allowed preachers freedom in what they could say from the pulpit. When Elizabeth officially banned the practice in 1577, she accused its practitioners of “dayly devis[ing], imagin[ing], propound[ing] and putt[ing] in execution sundries new rites and formes in the churche.”⁶ Thus she feared bishops moving beyond the religious settlement she and her advisers had crafted when granted too much latitude in what they could preach. Further, according to Susan Doran, Elizabeth believed that her subjects “could be better served by their hearing biblical passages read aloud in churches on Sundays and holy days than by listening to lengthy sermons.”⁷

The fact that Elizabeth allowed a crucifix to hang in her royal chapel sparked even greater controversy. In 1560, several bishops threatened not to

⁵ I Corinthians 7:32-33.

⁶ Elizabeth Tudor, “Elizabeth to John Whitgift,” 1577.

⁷ Susan Doran, “Elizabeth I’s Religion: The Evidence of Her Letters,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51, no. 4 (October 2000): 703-704.

preach in her royal chapel if the Queen refused to get to rid of the crucifix. Many Protestants had hoped for a return to the wholesale destruction of images practiced under Edward VI, but the *Thirty-Nine Articles* merely prohibited the “the worshipping and adoration of images” as a practice “vainly invented . . . and repugnant to the word of God.”⁸ Thus to Elizabeth and her advisers, scripture forbid the worshipping—not the presence—of the images. David Starkey wrote of Elizabeth’s religion: “True religion, *her* religion, lay between Man and his Maker. The outward forms, on the other hand, were the work of human hands.”⁹ The crucifix, made by “human hands,” was neither an object of worship nor adoration for Elizabeth; otherwise, it is unlikely she would have allowed such a prohibition to be part of church doctrine. For the Queen, the crucifix did not impede reformed worship; rather, it enhanced a reverent atmosphere in which worship could take place.

Centuries later, Patrick Collinson highlighted these and other differences between Elizabeth and some Protestants to create an image of Elizabeth as a crypto-Catholic. He begins his 1994 essay, “Windows on a Woman’s Soul: Questions about the Religion of Queen Elizabeth I,” evenhandedly enough, declaring that Elizabeth’s “personal preferences . . . are all but inaccessible.” From there, however, he attributes Catholic “personal preferences” to her that, in his opinion, override her religious settlement and writings. For Collinson, the Queen’s stance on the crucifix “brings us closer to the queen’s own convictions”

⁸ *Articles*, Article 22: “Of Purgatory,” 65.

⁹ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001), 259-260.

than, for instance, the formulation of church doctrine she approved. In fact, no evidence exists that the Queen ever adored, worshipped, or attached any liturgical significance to the crucifix as Collinson implies. Even so, it becomes one of the key points in building his ultimate case for Elizabeth's Catholicism: "And yet her religious conservatism was so consistently manifested, applied with such apparent conviction, that it is hard to believe that it went against the grain of her own beliefs and tastes. . . . It remains possible that the Elizabethan compromise of Protestantism was a concession not only to the conservative prejudices of Elizabeth's subjects but to her own feelings."¹⁰ Collinson's viewpoint assumes that Elizabeth had very little power over ecclesiastical matters and that she overrode her own "conservative prejudices" for the sake of politics. Perhaps so, but as I will argue, such alleged sentiments also oppose the Protestant view of salvation that Elizabeth espouses in her devotional writings.

Pope Pius V adopted quite a different view of the Queen during her reign, viewing her as a serious threat to English Catholicism rather than a closet supporter of it. In his 1570 *Regnans in excelsis*, he excoriated Elizabeth as "the pretended queen of England and the servant of crime," as well as a "a heretic and favourer of heretics" who, "having seized the crown and monstrously usurped the place of supreme head of the Church in all England together with the chief authority and jurisdiction belonging to it, has once again reduced this same

¹⁰ Patrick Collinson, "Windows in a Woman's Soul: Questions about the Religion of Queen Elizabeth I," *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 110.

kingdom . . . to a miserable ruin.”¹¹ Elizabeth herein becomes a thief on both grounds: a “pretended queen” who “seized the crown” and a “heretic” who “monstrously usurped” the position of “supreme head of the Church”—a title he reserves solely for himself.¹² He argues that Elizabeth’s heretical leadership has reduced England “to a miserable ruin,” and as a result, he absolved from guilt anyone who would overthrow her.

Whereas the Pope claimed that Elizabeth threatened religion with her heretical beliefs, John Foxe set forth a Protestant point of view of Elizabeth as a persecuted princess kept safe by God in order to become the scourge of Catholicism in England. In *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous times touching matters of the Church*, Foxe called Elizabeth “a chosen instrument of his [God’s] clemency” and presented her story as an example of Protestant suffering under Mary and of God’s will to rescue England:

Lady Elizabeth . . . after so long restraintment, so great dangers escaped, such blusterous storms overblown, so many injuries digested, and wrongs sustained, by the mighty protection of our merciful God, to our no small comfort and commodity, hath been exalted and erected out of thrall to liberty, out of danger to peace and quietness, from dread to dignity, from misery to majesty, from mourning to ruling: briefly, of a prisoner made a princess, and placed in her throne royal, proclaimed now queen.¹³

¹¹ Pope Pius V, *Regnans in excelsis*, given at St. Peter’s at Rome on April 27, 1570, available at <http://tudorhistory.org/primary/papalbull.html>.

¹² Ibid. It must be noted, however, that Elizabeth took the title “supreme governor of the church” rather than “supreme head,” as adopted by her father; according to Bishop Jewel in 1559, she felt the latter title should be reserved for Christ alone. See Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 14.

¹³ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, with a Life of the Martyrologist, and Vindication of the Work*, ed. George Townsend (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 624.

Foxe credits divine intervention with protecting Elizabeth from “thrall,” “danger,” “dread,” and “misery,” and with elevating her into “liberty” and “majesty” for the great “comfort” and “commodity” of her subjects. By accentuating Elizabeth’s trials and crediting God with her ascension, Foxe confirms her authority and endows her reign with godly purpose—themes that, as we shall see, Elizabeth takes up throughout her prayers.

Additional Protestant writers concentrated on their hopes for what Elizabeth could accomplish through her divine appointment. Prior to her coronation, John Hale imagined God’s intention “to deliver this realm, our country, from the tyranny of malicious Mary, and to commit it to the government of virtuous Elizabeth,” with the three-pronged goal of having “God’s word [be] truly taught and preached, youth well brought up in godly and honest exercises, and justice rightly ministered.” Hale predicted that the reward for fulfilling this mission would be that “all men shall confess that you are not only for proximity of blood preferred, but rather of God specially sent and ordained.”¹⁴ This notion of divine appointment and religious zeal influenced Elizabeth’s self-portrayal in her prayers, as we shall see, and served as a justification for her reign against critics who charged that, as a woman, she should have no say in religious or temporal matters. Hale and others argued that God had appointed her for the religious welfare of the kingdom; therefore, her claim to the throne could not be disputed.

¹⁴ John Hale, “An Oration of John Hale’s to the Queen’s Majesty; and Delivered to Her Majesty by a Certain Nobleman, at Her First Entrance to her Reign,” reprinted in John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 678-679.

Some modern historians have found the portrait of Elizabeth painted by Foxe, Hale, and others to be more compelling than the criticisms of more radical Protestant groups. According to Collinson, Norman Jones found that Elizabeth was the driving force behind the reforms that were achieved, despite Catholic opposition, and Winthrop Hudson believed that the *Book of Common Prayer* accurately reflected Elizabeth's own viewpoint.¹⁵ Christopher Haigh adds: "It has been usual for historians to suppose that Elizabeth cared little for religion, except as a political weapon in the maintenance of order, but this is probably unfair. She was a political realist, but this does not mean that she was indifferent to spiritual things: she cared about right religion, but she would not take foolish risks for it."¹⁶ Haigh, then, finds Elizabeth to be concerned with "right religion" but practical about the political realities of her day.

William P. Hugaard treats Elizabeth's religion seriously and casts doubt on the historical consensus on her personal beliefs:

Christianity, as it is known and practiced by most Anglicans today, resembles in its forms and attitudes the religion of Queen Elizabeth far more closely than it does that of many of her leading clerics in the opening years of her reign. Had she been of a different persuasion, the subsequent development of the English Church would possibly have been quite different. Sixteenth-century Roman Catholics and puritans knew this. The one sought to brand her a Machiavellian Jezebel, while the other accused her of being "neither hot nor cold", and of caring more for the "trifles" than for the substance of sincere religion. Those judgments were to be expected; more surprising is the way in which many historians have

¹⁵ Patrick Collinson, "Windows in a Woman's Soul," 99.

¹⁶ Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1998), 31-32.

accepted without question the judgment of those who had every motive for impugning Elizabeth's sincerity.¹⁷

Haugaard argues that the development of the English church and even its traditions today are grounded in Elizabeth's beliefs even more than those of "her leading clerics." He further suggests that the partisan religious factions of her day created a false impression of the Queen's devotion, as both Catholics and Puritans "had every motive for impugning Elizabeth's sincerity." Haugaard's assessment, I will argue, comports with Elizabeth's self-representation in her prayers. While discussing the Calvinist tenets of depravity and predestination in both her spiritual life and her royal life, she appears equally dismissive of those who disagree with her religious settlement, thereby angering those of the Catholic faction who thought of her as a heretic worthy of deposition and those in the Protestant camp who felt that her church shared too much in common with the Catholic Church.

Ties to Calvin

While contemporaries of Elizabeth and historians argue over the Queen's beliefs, few have studied the connection between the Queen's rhetoric and John Calvin's theology. Some have cited differences between Calvin and the Queen on church hierarchy and ceremony to argue against any agreement between the two; others have discerned a Calvinist consensus among English theologians.

Among the first group, Susan Doran writes of the differences between the English church hierarchy and the Genevan church, with its "four-fold ministry of pastors, elders, doctors, and deacons elected by individual congregations and a

¹⁷ William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: The Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1968), viii-ix.

network of representative assemblies.”¹⁸ In contrast, English church offices included bishops, archdeacons, cathedrals, and diocese. Similarly, the Genevan church took a strong stance against the use of images, while Elizabeth had “images excluded from the list of ‘things tending to idolatry and superstition’ which needed to be defaced and destroyed.”¹⁹ The introduction to a modern-day facsimile of Elizabeth’s *Book of Common Prayer* claims that, “The Queen had achieved a religious settlement, with regard to her own religious convictions and to what was possible and best for the nation, and would not countenance any major adjustment of it. . . . She would not tolerate any movement in Calvin’s direction.”²⁰ In this instance, Elizabeth could just as easily have been simply adhering to her original religious settlement, carefully choosing what to eliminate from worship while not wanting to unnecessarily alienate a public still steeped in Catholic tradition. Issues of church governance and ceremony, however, do not necessarily constitute wholesale doctrinal differences between the churches.

Another argument against a connection between Calvin and the Queen has been the cold reception Calvin received from the English court over his dedication of an edition of his commentaries on Isaiah to the Queen. Calvin, however, suggests that this was rooted in Elizabeth’s ire at John Knox, whose tract against female rule had been published in Geneva. In a letter to Sir William Cecil, Calvin

¹⁸ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion 1558-1603* (London, Routledge, 1994), 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer 1559*, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1976), 345.

writes: “The messenger to whom I gave in charge my commentaries upon Isaiah to be presented to the most serene queen, brought me word that my homage was not kindly received by her majesty, because she had been offended with me by reason of some writings published in this place.”²¹ So Calvin attributes the ill-feeling in the English court to his support of Knox, and the Genevan leader demonstrates his lack of animus toward the Queen by presenting, as his letter continues, biblical examples of women who ruled in a godly manner that he believed Elizabeth should emulate. So far from an argument in favor of those who deny any connection between Elizabeth and Calvin, the incident actually demonstrates that Calvin was trying to establish a relationship with Elizabeth’s regime, despite the problems caused by the publication of Knox’s tract in Geneva.

Calvin’s own writings enjoyed wide popularity in England, so a Calvinist influence on the Queen should come as no surprise. In 1545, Princess Elizabeth translated the first chapter of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (first published in French in Geneva in 1541) as a new year’s gift for her stepmother, Queen Katherine Parr.²² This chapter, entitled “How We Ought to Know God,” concentrates on human unworthiness and complete reliance upon God for salvation—a theme that would later carry through Elizabeth’s own prayers, as we

²¹ John Calvin, “John Calvin to Sir William Cecil, dated at Geneva, [after January 29, 1559],” *The Zurich Letters, Comprising the Correspondence of Several English Bishops and Others with some of the Helvetian Reformers, During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Rev. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 34-36.

²² Elizabeth Tudor, “Princess Elizabeth to Queen Katherine, December 30, 1545,” *Collected Works*, eds. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-11.

shall see. Latin editions of the full *Institutes* circulated in England prior to Elizabeth's coronation in 1559, and a complete English translation was published by Thomas Norton with the subtitle *Seen and allowed according to the order appointed in the Quene's Majesties instructions* in 1561.²³ Elizabeth commissioned a new edition of the Bible, later titled the Bishops' Bible, in part because she disliked the structure of church governance used in the Geneva Bible. This new edition retained most of the marginal notes from the Geneva Bible, further demonstrating theological kinship between the two churches. By 1600, there were ninety-one editions of Calvin's works published in English and fifty-six editions of the works of his successor Theodore Beza.²⁴ Another important and popular work at this time, the translation of the biblical Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney and his sister Mary, was based primarily on the Psalms from the Geneva Bible, according to Margaret Hannay, who likewise adds that Calvinist ties had a strong influence over the influential Sidney-Dudley alliance.²⁵

Members of Elizabeth's political circle and various church officials maintained ties to Calvin as well, extending Calvin's reach beyond the written word. Peter White contends that Puritans who preferred the Geneva Bible to the

²³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), xlii.

²⁴ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 61.

²⁵ Margaret P. Hannay, "'Doo What Men May Sing': Mary Sidney and the Tradition of Admonitory Dedication," *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), 156.

Bishops' Bible "received encouragement from persons near the queen, and especially from [Robert Dudley, earl of] Leicester."²⁶ In his bull of excommunication against Elizabeth, the pope wrote that Elizabeth "has ordered that books of manifestly heretical content be propounded to the whole realm and that impious rites and institutions after the rule of Calvin, entertained and observed by herself, be also observed by her subjects."²⁷ Haugaard offers a list of lesser-known church officials and members of parliament who had spent time in Geneva and maintained ties with Calvin's church,²⁸ and Doran contends that "Calvinist doctrines were soon absorbed by English preachers and theologians. Between 1570 and the end of the [Elizabeth's] reign, only one of the sermons preached at St. Paul's Cross expressed anti-Calvinist views, and its author (Samuel Harsnett) was reprimanded by the authorities, as a result."²⁹ Specifically, Doran argues that there was substantial agreement between Calvin and the English church on "predestination, sabbatarianism (strict observance of the Lord's Day), and the importance of preaching," and she identifies Thomas Cartwright and Archbishop Whitgift as "Calvinists."³⁰ In fact, Doran, Haugaard, David Cressy, and Lori Anne Ferrell, among others, agree that a "Calvinist consensus"

²⁶ Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

²⁷ Pope Pius V, *Regnans in excelsis*.

²⁸ William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation*, 27-28.

²⁹ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion*, 19-20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

existed among English theologians that seemed to intensify as Elizabeth's reign wore on.³¹

The path to salvation provided the main source of contention between the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Genevan and English churches on the other. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants believed that humanity was inherently sinful and that salvation depended on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, yet the two camps parted company on exactly what followed the crucifixion. For Roman Catholics, sinners could partake in earning their salvation through works of penance, participation in Christ's sacrifice during the mass (in which the bread and blood of remembrance were transformed by the priest into the body and blood of Christ), and through the intercession of the saints and the church in a routine of confession, mass, and prayers to the saints to prepare oneself for death.

Continental and English reformers, however, believed that no human could do anything but disobey God's law and expect God's judgment as a result and that holy communion was symbolic, not a miraculous transformation into Christ's body. In Calvinist thought, Christ's sacrifice applied only to those whom God chose for salvation through no merit of their own (the "elect"); the rest God chose to suffer the eternal damnation warranted by their constant sinning.

For the Swiss and English reformers, good works could no more earn salvation than man could alter God's eternal decree of predestination. As for the English tradition, Article 31 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* declared Christ's sacrifice on the cross to be sufficient for salvation, and Article 11 dismissed any notion that

³¹ See William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation*; Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion*; and *Religion and Society in Early Modern England*.

human good works played a role: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.”³² Christ’s sacrifice replaced the repetition of the sacrifice through the mass, and works could no longer be considered to ease the sinner’s passage into heaven. Instead, good works were considered evidence of goodness created in the otherwise depraved elect by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Of all the ties between Genevan and English reformers, Diarmaid MacCulloch counts the doctrine of salvation as the strongest:

Out of all the four areas of Calvinist theology, only one became the dominant interest of English Elizabethan theologians regardless of whether posterity has labeled them Puritan, Anglican or conformist: Calvin’s picture of salvation. . . . There is plenty of evidence for the wide dispersal of Calvinist soteriological ideas. A key text was the widely published Geneva version of the English Bible (1560) with its marginal notes directing key texts towards Calvinist interpretations—but the marginal notes in its official rival, the Bishop’s Bible of 1568, were equally affected by Reformed ideas about predestination. The one semi-officially sanctioned attempt to move beyond the Edwardian formularies in Elizabeth’s reign was the catechism published in 1563 by Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral; whereas the Prayer Book catechism of 1549 was innocent of Calvinist influence, one third of Nowell’s text was taken without significant alteration from Calvin’s catechism.³³

MacCulloch finds that Calvin’s ideas on salvation influenced both the new version of the Bible commissioned by Queen Elizabeth and the catechism composed by her dean of St. Paul’s, Alexander Nowell. He even finds a greater Calvinist influence over the catechism sanctioned by Elizabeth than approved during the reign of Edward VI. The chief point of Calvin’s theological writings—the process of salvation by which God’s eternal decree of predestination would

³² *Articles*, Article 31: “Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross,” 68; and Article 11: “Of the Justification of Man,” 62.

³³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England*, 64.

enable the elect to perform good deeds within bodies otherwise completely defiled by depravity—therefore became a definitive pillar of doctrine for the English church, as well.

Queen Elizabeth's Prayers

With such a strong foundation of Calvinism in the English church, it should come as no surprise that Calvinist theology influenced the rhetoric of Elizabeth's personal prayers. Elizabeth had long been acquainted with the practice of composing prayers for private devotion, through her English translation of Marguerite of Navarre's spiritual meditation and her multilingual translation of her stepmother's prayers. Thirty-nine of Elizabeth's own prayers are included in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, edited by Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose. These editors arrange Elizabeth's prayers chronologically, based upon published collections of the prayers: *Precationes privatae. Regiae E. R.* in 1563 (with all prayers in Latin and interspersed with scriptural passages);³⁴ a 1569 volume of *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin*;³⁵ a small book dated 1579-1582 containing multilingual prayers and pictures of both Elizabeth and François Hercule of Valois (and Duke of Anjou), with whom Elizabeth and her advisers engaged in

³⁴ Elizabeth Tudor, *Collected Works*, 135, n1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 143, n1. Although the editors note that Elizabeth's name does not appear in the volume, they argue that these prayers are indeed Elizabeth's compositions based, in part, on the fact that Elizabeth's coat of arms and an engraving of the Queen praying appear in the volume. They also contend that the publication of these prayers would have been difficult without the Queen's full knowledge and consent.

marriage negotiations;³⁶ and various individual prayers in Elizabeth's hand throughout her reign. In addition, the editors of *Collected Works* include several prayers attributed to Elizabeth and published in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (published in 1563) and Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones: contening severn severall lamps of virginitie, or distinct treatises: whereof the first five concerne praier and meditation: the other two last, preceptes and examples* (dated 1582).

Throughout these prayers, Elizabeth defends the Protestant vision of salvation in terms that bear a strong resemblance to Calvinist theology. Elizabeth presents an image of her spiritual life as full of sin and natural weakness. By Protestant standards, such a representation makes Elizabeth a model Christian, because she blames herself for her sins and praises God for granting her faith to recognize and feel repentant for her sins. Despite such rampant disobedience, Elizabeth nonetheless counts herself among God's elect as an object of God's mercy. Even as a member of God's elect, her daily life consists of a struggle against sin, and she constantly asks God to forgive her sins and to transform her into a more faithful creature.

Elizabeth presents herself as an ideal monarch in much the same fashion. She concentrates on the dangers that she faced growing up and throughout her reign, and she credits God for ordaining and empowering her despite these many challenges. Just as she struggles with sin in her daily life, Elizabeth discusses her reign in terms of striving to overcome her natural weaknesses—many of which

³⁶ Ibid., 311, n1.

she describes as female weaknesses—and attributes her successes to God’s making her a just ruler. She establishes herself as a divine appointee, and she emphasizes her role in leading the English church as a mission she must fulfill—as always, with God’s help—in order to receive the heavenly crown as her ultimate reward.

The prayers present themselves as personal conversations with God and also with her subjects (since many of the prayers were published in some format during and after her lifetime). Within these conversations, she adopts a rhetorical strategy laid out by John Calvin in his analysis of Paul’s writings: “Thus before God nothing remains for us to boast of save His mercy [cf. I Corinthians 4:13], whereby we have been received into hope of eternal salvation through no merit of our own [cf. Titus 3:5]; and before men nothing but our weakness [cf. II Corinthians 11:30; 12:5 and 9].”³⁷ Likewise, Elizabeth dwells on her failure to obey God’s law and stresses how God has saved her in spite of her disobedience and enables her to recognize her sins and change, thereby expressing gratitude for God’s mercy in the immediate context of the prayer and before the public. Just as Calvin writes that the proper monarch must spread the gospel and care for the souls of his or her subjects above all else, Elizabeth places a clear priority on her duties as spiritual leader in her devotions.

If these are the themes of the prayers, then what kind of compositions are they? Elizabeth uses direct quotations and paraphrases of biblical passages and from church liturgy, as well as original composition. This composite writing style

³⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 12.

may complicate the historian's search for her personal religious beliefs, but it was not uncommon in the sixteenth century, particularly for devotional writings. The editors of *Collected Works* describe her devotions as "yet another form of co-production between an individual Christian and the collective voice of the Church, with its accumulated texts and traditions."³⁸ So while the prayers may not allow us to render a definitive judgment on Elizabeth's personal religious beliefs, we may analyze them to see what sort of issues Elizabeth emphasized in fashioning her own spiritual and political journey.

Like the editors of *Collected Works*, Haugaard describes a collaborative-style of authorship for Elizabeth's devotional texts:

These prayers represent the work, not of an isolated devotee seeking to express original spiritual insights and unique liturgy of the English Church through its changes from her birth; one who had studied the New Testament in its original tongue; one who had been thoroughly exposed to the whole Bible and to selections of Christian patristics in her education; who, as a young girl, had translated into French, Italian, and Latin her stepmother's extensive English devotions; and one who once remarked to a parliamentary delegation that she had "studied nothing else but divinity till [she] came to the crown." That her own devotional compositions would accordingly contain concepts, images, phrases, and whole sentences from scriptural, liturgical, and other existing sources ought to be expected.³⁹

For Haugaard, then, the Queen's prayers represent a combination of thoughts influenced by her earlier studies of "scriptural, liturgical," and other sources—none of which detract from the value of the devotions as representations of the kind of faith that Elizabeth projected to her subjects. With such an extensive

³⁸ Leah Marcus, et al., "Preface," *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, xiii.

³⁹ William P. Haugaard, "Elizabeth Tudor's *Book of Devotions*: A Neglected Clue to the Queen's Life and Character," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, no. 2 (1981): 80-81.

background in scriptural research, it is important to pay attention to the rhetorical tools that Elizabeth borrows from her sources in order to create her own self-image through the published prayers.

The prayers then constitute a form of self-expression designed to inspire godly meditation and a model for English Protestants on how to address God, how to recognize one's natural tendency toward sin and weakness, and how to appeal for God's help to wrestle with sin and for His mercy to escape eternal punishment. The self-image Elizabeth portrays also argues for the legitimacy of her reign by setting herself up as God's choice to rule over England and to dispatch the enemies of the church. The importance of the prayers lies not in conclusive proof of Elizabeth's religious leanings, but rather in the rhetoric with which she presents her spiritual and political journey as a sinner and weak human chosen for a special mission by God Himself.

Of Human Depravity

In terms of the spiritual journey, Elizabeth represents herself as a disobedient servant to God who can do nothing right on her own. She provides a self-examination of her sinful life in the prayers, emphasizing human depravity in her rhetoric in a manner that mirrors Calvin's teachings. Both Calvin and Elizabeth emphasize three main points regarding human depravity: it begins with original sin (a doctrine common to both Catholic and Protestant traditions), manifests itself in constant disobedience, and leads to eternal damnation. The effect of such a doctrine is to make sinners completely dependent upon God's mercy to comprehend their sin and ultimate destinies, for sinners have been so blinded by

sin that they fail to recognize that what they are doing is wrong so can never repent, let alone escape judgment on their own. This Calvinist vision treats confession not as a steppingstone to earn salvation as under the Catholic tradition, but rather as a mark of God's grace at work to recognize sin and as a reminder to a sinner to constantly seek God's forgiveness and help to live by the law. By representing herself as a disobedient and fallen creature in God's eyes, Elizabeth affirms the Calvinist vision of salvation and presents herself as the ideal Christian who recognizes her sin and relies upon God's mercy.

Calvin describes his three-pronged approach to human depravity in the following manner:

Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh" [Galatians 5:19]. And that is properly what Paul often calls sin. The works that come forth from it—such as adulteries, fornications, thefts, hatreds, murders, carousings—he accordingly calls "fruits of sin" [Galatians 5:19-21], although they are also commonly called "sins" in Scripture, and even by Paul himself.⁴⁰

He thus denigrates humanity as incapable of any good deeds. No one escapes the stain of Adam's sin, which entirely corrupts human nature. The wickedness that results from original sin then makes everyone a target of God's wrath. He further lists specific examples of the behavior that arises from humanity's degenerate nature, all of which contrast with Paul's enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit in a later passage from Galatians 5. So Adam's sin corrupts all generations, none of which can escape the effects of the original stain and its consequences.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 251.

Elizabeth adapts Calvin's description of sin to demonstrate God's mercy and her own lack of merit in her prayers. In 1563, a volume of Elizabeth's prayers was published entirely in Latin under the title *Precationes privatae. Regiae E.R.* [Private prayers of Queen Elizabeth at Court]. This volume includes several "collects" (short prayers designed to emphasize one or two important points, usually in recognition of a special occasion or season) and biblical verses introducing some of the prayers.⁴¹ This volume was published several months after Elizabeth recovered from a serious bout of smallpox. Also during 1563, the English bishops passed the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the doctrinal statement of the English church, with Elizabeth's approval. On the issue of human depravity, the church described original sin as "the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam," leading to a depraved nature that "lusteth always contrary to the spirit" and is therefore deserving "God's wrath and damnation."⁴² For the English church, as for Calvin, original sin infects every part of the human soul, translating into behaviors that warrant eternal punishment.

Perhaps more keenly aware of the frailty of life after her recovery, Elizabeth introduces one collect from the 1563 volume with versicles (short scriptural phrases, according to the editors of the *Collected Works*) in which she marks herself as worthy of God's judgment: "Enter not into judgment with Thy handmaid, / For in Thy sight no man living shall be justified./ If Thou wilt mark

⁴¹ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayers 3 and 4," *Collected Works*, 136, n1 and n2.

⁴² *Articles*, Article 9: "Of Original Sin," 62.

iniquities, O Lord,/ Lord, who will be able to stand?”⁴³ The first two lines derive from Psalm 143:2, authored by the biblical King David, but Elizabeth changes the original identification of “thy servant” to “Thy handmaid” to apply these verses to her own experience, thereby aligning herself with David’s plea for God’s mercy. She treats depravity as universal by repeating David’s words that no one can “be justified” or escape judgment without divine assistance. By introducing the prayer in this manner, Elizabeth places escape from judgment outside of humanity’s reach and in God’s hands only. She appeals to her readership by casting her lot with them in terms of depravity and her own expectation of judgment. Even from her exalted position as governor of the church, her choice of these particular verses denotes a dependence on God’s mercy. And it makes clear to the readers that, if even the head of the church is subject to God’s judgment, everyone will face the same end.

Having cast herself as just as incapable of overcoming sin and escaping divine judgment as the rest of humanity, Elizabeth praises God’s merciful nature in advance of asking for forgiveness. She describes God first as “long-suffering,” “of great compassion,” and motivated by a desire that the sinner “be converted and live,” rather than die as His justice requires. She marks her departure from the Roman Catholic position by crediting God with doing all the work to change her otherwise sinful soul. She not only asks for mercy, but also pleads: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, which may truly declare Thy mercy and my misery. For Thou art my God and my King; I am Thy handmaid and the work of Thy

⁴³ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 4: A Collect,” *Collected Works*, 136, n3.

hands.”⁴⁴ Here again, as with the “versicles” introducing the prayer, she adopts David’s words (this time from Psalm 51:10): “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” and then inserts her own rationale for God’s willingness to forgive her sins so that her cleansed heart can declare His mercy and her own depravity. She leaves the reader with no sense that she can somehow participate in earning this mercy; rather, God must do all the work out of kindness that she does not deserve. In this way she confirms God’s treatment of her as an object of mercy, for the prayer demonstrates the work she asks God to do in her heart: it declares His mercy and the “misery” of her sinful state. The final sentence of the quotation describes a relationship in which Elizabeth is God’s servant and creation, and she actually becomes His re-creation in that He cleanses her heart to demonstrate His power and mercy.

Elizabeth continues the theme of personal depravity in this prayer, echoing David’s sentiment by describing her sins as directly against God. In David’s case, he has been confronted on his sin of coveting the married Bathsheba, sending her husband into battle to be killed, and taking the widow as his wife. David cries out to God: “For I knowledge my fautes, my synne is ever before me. Against thee only have I synned, and done this evyll in thy syght.”⁴⁵ David thereby categorizes his sin as directly against God and emphasizes the scope of his guilt by declaring his sin to be constant. Elizabeth likewise treats her sin as a personal affront to God: “[A]gainst myself I confess my impiety. I have sinned, I have sinned, Father, against heaven and in Thy sight; I am unworthy the whole of Thy

⁴⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁵ Psalm 51:4.

compassion. I have not kept Thy covenant, nor have I walked in Thy law. I have abandoned Thee, O God, my Maker; I have withdrawn from Thee, my Savior. I have strayed from Thy counsels.”⁴⁶ No wonder, then, that David and Elizabeth cry out to God to purify their hearts, for neither of them can admit of any actions except for sin. Elizabeth describes herself as a willfully disobedient daughter and creation, one whose role in the relationship is defined by having “abandoned,” “withdrawn,” and “strayed” from her “Father” and “Maker,” forsaking His “covenant” and “law” in the process.

Elizabeth thus formulates the notion that she can only sin and that God must cleanse her heart, using David’s psalm as a model for her own confession and plea for God’s mercy. Published in 1563, this prayer affirms the vision for salvation laid out in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and demonstrates the lesson that Elizabeth takes from her near-death experience, that at any time one could be called to face God’s judgment. Even she, a powerful monarch and head of the church, can do nothing to save herself and must cry out for God’s mercy, just as David did. Her self-presentation as an unfaithful creation, daughter, and servant of God highlights God’s sovereignty over her, because only God can transform her wicked heart to acknowledge her sin and His compassion. She does not specifically mention original sin in this prayer, but she nevertheless demonstrates its effects as outlined by Calvin in her declaration of her sins and the judgment she deserves. She chooses to make these points by presenting herself as a type of David, one of the most popular biblical figures for Protestants. She furthermore

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 4,” 136-137.

sways her Protestant readers by presenting her personal example of Calvin's teaching on human depravity and God's mercy. As Kevin Sharpe writes, "Language, theologians maintained, was the key to divine truths; to Protestant reformers such as John Bale, the word offered unmediated access to the divinity."⁴⁷ Elizabeth offered access to her conversations with God in the form of her published prayers, and in doing so defined the parameters of the public debate over religious matters by enforcing the Calvinist doctrine of human depravity with her own personal example. She admits to being subject to the same corruption as all of humanity and dependent upon God's mercy and makes this clear using David's language.

Elizabeth traces a pattern of original sin, a life full of wickedness, and an expectation of judgment in a prayer published in the 1569 volume *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin*.⁴⁸ By the time this volume appeared, tragedy had again intervened to remind Elizabeth of the precarious nature of human life, with her cousin Mary deposed from the Scottish throne and fleeing to England only to be taken into custody under suspicion of plotting to depose Elizabeth. The year of the publication, in fact, Elizabeth's government defeated the revolt by northern earls and uncovered the plot to marry the Duke of Norfolk to Mary. In this atmosphere, it is not

⁴⁷ Kevin Sharpe, "The King's Writ: Royal Authors and Royal Authority in Early Modern England," *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayer 16: Confession of Sins unto the Lord," *Collected Works*, 152-153, under the section "The Italian Versicles and Prayers."

difficult to understand why Elizabeth would be ever cognizant of the precarious nature of human life and of her power.

In one prayer from this volume, the Queen again emphasizes her own depravity, this time espousing the doctrine of original sin, confessing its effect on her life, and confirming the judgment to which she was subject for her misdeeds. She lays out the framework for this prayer, as in the earlier collect, by quoting from Psalm 32:5: “I have made known unto Thee my sin, and I have not covered my iniquity; I have said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou hast taken away the iniquity of my sin.” The introductory verses announce Elizabeth’s task in this prayer: she confesses her sins openly before God (and before the wider audience of those who read the published volume of prayers), and yet she does so—as does the psalmist—to demonstrate that God has forgiven her or removed the guilt of her sins. As was the case for the previous Elizabethan prayer discussed, the psalmist again provides a model for Elizabeth in terms of his confession of sinfulness and the credit he gives God for erasing his sins.

Following this framework, Elizabeth writes: “My God and my Lord, humbly and with a soul full of infinite displeasure at having offended Thee and at offending 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.”⁴⁹ She accentuates her depravity, and she approaches God as her “Lord” and “divine majesty,” even from her exalted position as Queen of England. She further indicates her subservient position by identifying herself as “Thy humble

⁴⁹ Ibid., 152.

handmaid and sinner.” She declares herself unable to live up to even this humble position, for she admits to sinning continuously against her Lord, which causes her to feel “infinite displeasure” in her soul.

Why would Elizabeth abase herself so publicly? She would, after all, seem to confirm the criticism of the lack of female virtue (alleged by many of her critics) with such public confessions, yet her rhetorical strategy of acknowledging (at least in general terms) her shame and her inability to please God demonstrates humility that, for Calvin, denotes God’s grace at work in her heart. Calvin writes: “[K]nowledge of ourselves lies first in considering what we were given at creation and how generously God continues his favor toward us. . . . Secondly, to call to mind our miserable condition after Adam’s fall; the awareness of which, when all our boasting and self-assurance are laid low, should truly humble us and overwhelm us with shame.”⁵⁰ Elizabeth pleads for God to “continue his favor” by forgiving her constant tendency to sin, and her self-image as an offending servant demonstrates the awareness that Calvin characterizes as a mark of God’s mercy in forcing the sinner to recognize her miserable and fallen state and to feel shame for her misdeeds.

Elizabeth traces the origin of such shame back to the original sin she inherits as a descendent of Adam, continuing to keep in mind the sinner’s “miserable condition after Adam’s fall,” in the words of Calvin. Elizabeth writes: “I was, as Thou knowest, conceived and born in sin; I have come out of the same

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 242.

mass of corruption from which the whole lineage of mankind is taken.”⁵¹ In this passage, Elizabeth echoes David once again, this time from Psalm 51:5: “Beholde, I was shapen in wyckednesse, in synne hath my mother conceyved me.” Elizabeth thus characterizes herself, as did David, as corrupted even at the point of conception. It is no wonder, then, that both David and Elizabeth cry out for God to cleanse and recreate their hearts. Neither of them can erase the stain of corruption delivered through conception. Ironically, Elizabeth’s conception is something that Catholics used to assail her character, because she had been conceived by Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn while Henry was still married to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. In this case, however, Elizabeth applies the stain of degenerate corruption—as do Catholics and Calvinists alike—to all of humanity, thereby establishing herself as no worse than the larger audience of readers of her published prayer.

As before, Elizabeth once again falls directly in line with Calvin’s teaching on the topic, which itself draws upon the writings of David and Paul in his declaration: “When Adam was despoiled, human nature was left naked and destitute . . . when he was infected with sin, contagion crept into human nature. . . . [T]he beginning of corruption in Adam was such that it was conveyed in a perpetual stream from the ancestors into their descendants.”⁵² Calvin describes original sin as humanity’s inheritance from Adam, corrupting everyone even at the point of conception.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 16,” 152.

⁵² John Calvin, *Institutes*, 250.

What results from such corrupted seed? Elizabeth demonstrates her inability to do anything but sin:

I find myself always full of evil affections, and I know nothing good to which Thy Holy Spirit might guide me, but every hour I bend lower towards the earth and towards evil, whither the heavy weight of this flesh draws me. . . . My flesh is so frail that I am not able to do otherwise than err and sin heavily before Thee, my God, for which I feel over me Thy just wrath leading to final condemnation.⁵³

Elizabeth's rhetoric herein details the scope of her personal depravity, and though she lists no specific sins, she establishes the thoroughness of her corruption. The only deeds for which she can take credit are being "always full of evil affections," "know[ing] nothing good," and "bend[ing] towards evil." In fact, the only good comes from the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not from her own power. Her tendency and frailty, all bending away from the Holy Spirit and toward sin, demonstrate the state of human nature that Calvin describes as "naked and destitute," and lead Elizabeth to admit that her just end will be God's "wrath" and "final condemnation."

Why would the Queen of England and the "supreme governor" of the newly established English church describe herself in such thoroughly corrupted terms before the public audience? What accounts for this sort of personal abasement by a queen who faced an attitude against women as typified by John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet*: "[W]here women reign or be in authority that there must needs vanity be preferred to virtue, ambition and pride to temperance and modesty, and finally, that avarice, the mother of all mischief, must needs

⁵³ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayer 16," 152.

devour equity and justice.”⁵⁴ Upon first glance, it might seem that Elizabeth’s continual abasement of herself and enunciation of her sins would confirm the criticism of women at this time typified by Knox’s tract against female rule, in which he treats female leadership as a punishment for a nation full of the sins of “vanity,” “pride,” “avarice,” and “mischief.” If Knox finds that a kingdom under a queen contains no “equity and justice,” Elizabeth seems to confirm his judgment in the almost-despairing moments of her prayers during which she declares herself to be awaiting God’s just sentence for her misdeeds.

Elizabeth’s self-presentation, however, turns her vices into virtue and creates the image of an ideal Christian under Calvin’s formulation of acknowledging one’s sinfulness in order to highlight God’s mercy—a particularly appropriate task for the head of the English church to undertake, especially as the church attempts to set down roots. Although Elizabeth’s description of her sins is largely general, it serves as a spiritual accounting in which she records how she constantly falls short of God’s law and therefore requires God’s grace to escape the judgment she readily admits she deserves. That Elizabeth keeps such a record of her sins, confessed to the direct audience of God and her subjects, serves as a marker of God’s grace in her life, for she would otherwise remain too corrupted to recognize her frailties and the judgment she deserves. Calvin writes:

For what is more consonant with faith than to recognize that we are naked of all virtue, in order to be clothed by God? That we are empty of all good, to be filled by him? That we are slaves of sin, to be freed by him? Blind, to be illumined by him? Lame, to be made straight by him? Weak, to be

⁵⁴ John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” *The Political Writings of John Knox* (Washington, D.C.: Folger Books, 1985), 44, originally published in 1558.

sustained by him? To take away from us all occasion for glorying, that he alone may stand forth gloriously and we glory in him [cf. I Corinthians 1:31; II Corinthians 10:17].⁵⁵

So in the confession of sins, according to Calvin, Elizabeth strips herself of any good and cries out for God's mercy—the only force that can change her, or in Calvin's metaphors, clothe, fill, illumine, straighten, and sustain her. Only when she admits to being “naked of all virtue,” or “empty of all good” can God work within her, and such an admission becomes evidence of her God-given faith.

Although confession was an important part of Catholic tradition, Elizabeth does not count her confession as a step toward earning God's mercy. Rather, she keeps track of her sins to ask forgiveness and to highlight God's grace at work, forcing her to admit them and depend upon Him for forgiveness. Elizabeth's rhetoric—following Calvin's example—leaves no room for human involvement in salvation, as allowed under the Catholic tradition of confession and penance. Instead, Elizabeth traces her depravity from original sin, through the misdeeds that fill her every day, to the destruction that awaits her as judgment for disobeying God's word. She praises God as full of mercy and able to forgive her, while she credits herself with nothing but sin. Her confessions reveal a rhetorical awareness that with God's help, she must remain on the watch against her sin and must always ask for God's forgiveness. By aligning herself with Calvin's plan for salvation, she rebuts Protestant criticism of her ecclesiastical leadership and represents herself as a model sinner under the Protestant paradigm.

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 13.

For Calvin, the very act of prayer signifies God's mercy at work in a sinner. In one case, Calvin refers to the example of David in writing Psalm 51: "For even if believers sometimes ask that their hearts be conformed to obedience to God's law, as David in a number of passages does, yet we must also note this desire to pray comes from God. This we may infer from David's words. When he desires that clean heart be created in himself [Psalm 51:10], surely he does not credit himself with the beginning of its creation."⁵⁶ Calvin thus argues that humanity is so thoroughly depraved and unable to do anything right that even the desire to pray must come from God, making prayer a mark of God's mercy already at work, humbling the sinner who is chosen for mercy. Elizabeth expresses this notion explicitly in one prayer from the 1569 *Christian Prayers and Meditations*, in which she asks God's help to pray: "Dispose my heart, open my lips, and lead me by Thy Holy Spirit to a true acknowledgement of all my faults."⁵⁷ In this passage, Elizabeth takes no credit even for her own confessions, instead asking that the Holy Spirit guide her to acknowledge all of her faults—a role that Catholic tradition reserves for the priest in drawing a complete confession from the sinner in order to grant full absolution.⁵⁸ The rhetorical effect of the prayers, even when dwelling on her utter lack of goodness, is to provide a public record—especially for those who would characterize her sins as

⁵⁶ Ibid., 288.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayer 10: Preface," *Collected Works*, 143-144, under the heading "The French Prayers and Poems."

⁵⁸ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 58-60.

confirmation of female degradation—that she is, indeed, a sinner being changed by God’s grace.

Especially in the prayer entitled “Confession of Sins,” published in the same year as the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Elizabeth provides a model for prayer and reinforces the doctrine of her church. According to Article 10, “The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God.”⁵⁹ Elizabeth applies this distinctly Protestant doctrine to her own life, creating of herself an example of the principle that no one should trust in any “good works” within themselves and instead asserting that one is only capable of calling upon God because of His mercy enabling her to do so. In the midst of confession, she marks her prayers not as an example of a good work that she can do on her own, but rather as a sign of her genuine faith. She wins credibility with her audience by declaring her kinship with them in being born into original sin, feeling the devastating effects of the Fall in her constant disobedience, and fearing the judgment owed to her for disobeying God. She therefore provides a model of a struggling sinner who must always seek God’s forgiveness, even in her exalted position as the Queen of England.

This declaration of sinfulness reinforces Elizabeth’s spiritual authority by confessing herself to be a sinner, which only God can motivate her to do, and she urges her subjects to follow her example. As Kevin Sharpe writes, “Speaking,

⁵⁹ *Articles*, Article 10: “Of Free Will,” 62.

writing, discursive performances . . . not only reflect social arrangements and structures of authority; they are themselves acts of authority.”⁶⁰ By presenting herself as a depraved sinner who can do no good works on her own and who is completely dependent upon God even for recognition of her sins, Elizabeth confirms that she is worthy of her ecclesiastical authority in that she strictly adheres to the Protestant—and, more importantly, the Calvinist—vision for salvation. Her self-representation is indeed a humble one, full of self-abasement and declarations that her misdeeds subject her to God’s judgment, yet her confessions display God’s work in enabling her to acknowledge her depraved nature. Within the confines of Calvinist soteriology, she provides a model of confessional prayer that she expects her subjects to follow.

Of Predestination

For Roman Catholics, the confession of sins represented a method by which sinners could earn salvation; Protestants, on the other hand, viewed the confession of sins as a sign of humility that only God could inspire among those for whom He had preordained salvation. Elizabeth makes clear throughout her confessions that she can do nothing to earn God’s mercy, but she also declares that she is a member of the elect. In doing so, she treats God as the sole author of salvation and espouses the doctrine of predestination formulated by John Calvin, distinguishing between herself as a chosen object of God’s mercy and others whom God chooses to condemn. She espouses the doctrine of double predestination, revealing how it manifests itself in a believer’s life. Her prayers on

⁶⁰ Kevin Sharpe, “The King’s Writ,” 127.

the topic—just as those focusing on human depravity—become a spiritual testament to the workings of God’s mercy and an affirmation of her worthiness to rule by virtue of God transforming her into a vessel of mercy and honor.

The *Thirty-Nine Articles* were adopted by the bishops of the English church in 1563 under Elizabeth’s supervision, and by 1571, parliament made adherence to them a legal requirement. In this document, the church defines predestination as “the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.”⁶¹ Thus God alone, from all eternity, chooses part of humanity to receive salvation through Christ’s sacrifice. Those chosen for salvation can do nothing to influence God’s choice, because God’s decision was made before He even created the world. The article then distinguishes the effect of predestination theology on two groups. For the godly, this doctrine is “full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort,” for the Holy Spirit causes “mortifying [of] the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God.”⁶² The doctrine has the opposite effect for those not chosen for salvation, however: “For curious and carnal persons, lacking the spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of

⁶¹ *Articles*, Article 17: “Of Predestination and Election,” 64.

⁶² *Ibid.*

God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation."⁶³ So predestination either provides comfort and leads to a godly life or provokes desperation and intensifies depraved living.

These principles draw upon Calvin's writings on double predestination:

God, by His eternal goodwill, which has no cause outside itself, destined those whom He pleased to salvation, rejecting the rest; those whom He dignified by gratuitous adoption He illumined by His Spirit, so that they receive the life offered in Christ, while others voluntarily disbelieve, so that they remain in darkness destitute of the light of faith.⁶⁴

For Calvin, as for the English church, humanity consists of two groups: one for whom God chooses salvation and illumines through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the rest who "voluntarily disbelieve" and lack faith. Although the *Thirty-Nine Articles* more clearly delineated the effects on the two groups, both Calvin and the English bishops leave little doubt as to the two camps of humanity and their ends.

Despite these similarities between Calvin and the English church on the issue of double predestination, David Starkey attempts to place Calvin and Elizabeth at odds on the issue:

The other "window into Elizabeth's soul" is the requirement that the clergy should combat "the vice of damnable despair" by pointing out to their parishioners "such comfortable places and sentences of scripture as do set forth the mercy, benefits and goodness of Almighty God towards all penitent and believing persons". . . . But "damnable despair", that is, the conviction that one was irretrievably damned, was central to the theology of both extremes—Roman Catholicism on the one hand and Calvinist Protestantism on the other—against which Elizabeth strove. The Catholic combated "damnable despair" with the magical apparatus of saints and

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co. Limited, 1961), 58.

sacraments; the Calvinist, with the bleak doctrine of predestination, which affirmed that they—the elect—were saved, whereas the unregenerate mass of mankind was damned. Elizabeth instead stuck to the Evangelicalism of her youth and insisted that [the] Gospel offered God’s grace to all.⁶⁵

Starkey finds that Elizabeth disagrees with Calvin on the issue of double predestination, pitting what he believes to be Elizabeth’s belief in universal grace against the Catholic and Protestant traditions in which humanity could despair of salvation when faced with its inherent sinfulness and divine judgment. He contrasts the way that Catholics and Protestants dealt with this human tendency and inserts his judgment that Elizabeth believed in a universal offer of salvation somewhere in the middle between the “theology of both extremes.”

Starkey’s claim of difference between Calvin and Elizabeth seems ill-conceived, however, based on how Elizabeth discusses predestination in her writings. Elizabeth deals with the issue of double predestination directly in one prayer from the 1579-1582 collection, written in the Queen’s own hand. Within “The French Prayer,” the Queen uses the metaphor of illumination, as did Calvin, to distinguish between two groups divided by God’s eternal choice:

My God and my Father, since it has pleased Thee to extend the treasures of Thy great mercy towards me, Thy most humble servant, having early in the day drawn me back from the deep abysses of natural ignorance and damnable superstitions to make me enjoy this great sun of righteousness which brings in its rays life and salvation, even while Thou leavest still many kings, princes, and princesses in ignorance under the power of Satan.⁶⁶

Throughout this passage, Elizabeth projects an image in which God is all powerful, choosing to show her “great mercy” while leaving some fellow royals

⁶⁵ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*, 285-286.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 31: The French Prayer,” *Collected Works*, 314.

bereft of mercy. Elizabeth describes herself as a recipient of—rather than an active participant in—God’s mercy. She identifies herself as “Thy most humble servant,” and God signifies this by relieving her “natural ignorance,” under which she might still practice “damnable superstitions”—a frequent Protestant description of Catholic beliefs in such practices as the worship of relics and the power of the priest to transform the host into Christ’s body. And while God grants Elizabeth salvation and righteousness, He chooses to leave some monarchs “under the power of Satan.” Through God’s mercy, then, she becomes a spiritually empowered monarch, and she confirms her authority by depicting God’s favor toward her in contrast to the condition in which He chooses to leave some monarchs.

This self-presentation of a monarch divinely endowed with righteousness and spiritual illumination becomes a spiritual and political defense against those Protestants who feared an alliance with the Catholic Duke, especially at the end of a decade of religious turmoil. In 1570, Pope Pius V issued his papal bull calling upon English Catholics to rise up and depose their Queen. On August 24, 1572, French Protestants were massacred on St. Bartholomew’s Day. In 1574, Catholic seminary priests began arriving from the continent to help keep the Catholic faith alive in England. Beginning in 1579, a public campaign was waged against the proposed marriage to the Duke of Anjou. Despite her isolation as a lone female monarch among a majority of Catholic kings—a fact that parliament consistently reminded her of in its numerous petitions that she marry and produce an heir—Elizabeth places herself in a position of strength rhetorically, as she describes

God's choice to have mercy on her but not on other rulers. Interestingly, Elizabeth does not pray for their salvation; she merely states that they remain "under the power of Satan" while she is illumined by God's righteousness. Thus double predestination sets her spiritually and politically apart from other rulers, because she is a member of the elect while many of them are damned.

By making such a distinction between herself and other princes who were not objects of God's mercy, Elizabeth aligns herself with Calvin's teaching that God does not offer salvation to all men. Calvin bases this doctrine in the writings of Paul, who "calls those chosen who are by faith engrafted into the body of Christ; and that this is something not common to all men is plain. Paul therefore refers to those only whom Christ condescends to call after they have been given to [Christ] by the Father."⁶⁷ Calvin writes that faith follows God's eternal choice to predestine some to salvation, and he limits God's grace to the elect, not to all (in accordance with his interpretation of Paul). Faith comes as a free gift from God that engrafts the elect into the body of Christ, or in Elizabeth's words, into "this great sun of righteousness" and out of the darkness of Satan's power under which Elizabeth considers some of her fellow princes to remain.

Just as Elizabeth uses the doctrine to set herself above other princes in terms of God's favor, she also uses it as a rhetorical framework in which to

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination*, 71. The biblical reference is Ephesians 1:3-6: "Blessed be God the father of our Lorde Jesus Christ, which hath blessed us with all maner of spirituall blessynge in hevenly thynges by Christ, accordinge as he had chosen us in him, before the foundations of the worlde were layde, that we shuld bee holy, and without blame before him, thorow love. Which ordeyned us before thorow Jesus Christ to be heyres unto him selfe, accordynge to the good pleasure of his will, to the prayse and glorie of his grace, wher with he hath made us accepted thorow the beloved."

interpret political events. During the 1580s, Jesuit priests arrived from the continent to keep the Catholic faith alive in England; the Throckmorton and Babington Plots were exposed in 1583 and 1586, respectively; and Spain signed a treaty with the French Catholic League in 1584. Parliament responded by imposing the death penalty on Catholic missionary priests and on any Englishmen who harbored them, and by urging Queen Elizabeth to execute the imprisoned Mary, Queen of Scots, for her part in assassination plots. In an October 4, 1586, letter to King James VI of Scotland (later King James I of England), Elizabeth characterizes her Jesuit enemies as reprobates:

And for that curse of design rose up from the wicked suggestion of the Jesuits, which make it an acceptable sacrifice to God and meritorious to themselves that a king not of their profession should be murdered, therefore I could keep my pen no longer from discharging my care of your person, that you suffer not such vipers to inhabit your land. . . . [W]hen they are given to a reprobate sense, they often make such a slip.”⁶⁸

In Elizabeth’s view, the Jesuits distort religion by disguising their “wicked suggestion” of assassination as an “acceptable sacrifice to God.” Elizabeth also treats their plots as evidence that they have a “reprobate sense,” a word that Calvin routinely uses to describe those whom God has chosen for damnation.⁶⁹ Such harsh terms serve her purpose of warning James of the danger he faces from the Jesuits, as well. She accentuates this warning by presenting herself as a would-be victim of the reprobates, whom she further identifies as “murderers” and “vipers.” Thus the plots become evidence of her election, for the reprobate

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Tudor, “Letter 70: Elizabeth to James, October 4, 1586,” *Collected Works*, 287; in the Queen’s hand.

⁶⁹ See, for example, John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination*, 69-70, 81, and 84.

Jesuits, in her view, cannot tolerate God's choice on the English throne or as head of the English church.

Similarly, Elizabeth uses the Calvinist terms of double predestination to express outrage over the conversion of Henry IV of France back to Catholicism in 1593. She treats Henry's abandonment of Protestantism as typifying the story of Jacob and Esau:

Ah what griefs, O what regrets, O what groanings felt I in my soul at the sound of such news . . . My God, is it possible that any worldly respect should efface the terror with which the fear of God threatens us? Can we with any reason expect a good sequel from an act so iniquitous? I still hope that a sounder inspiration will come to you. However, I will not cease to place you in the forefront of my devotions, that the hand of Esau may not spoil the blessings of Jacob.⁷⁰

According to Genesis 27, Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for food and therefore forsook His place in the covenant line passed through the eldest son, which was promised to eventually lead to the Messiah. The editors of Elizabeth's *Collected Works* identify the Protestant belief that the Reformation had recreated this biblical story in which "the younger brother (Jacob, identified with Protestantism) takes away the birthright of the elder (Esau and Catholicism)."⁷¹ In this vision, the established Roman Catholic Church forfeited its position as the true church to Protestantism, which Protestants felt God favored as He did the younger son Jacob over Esau. To Elizabeth, Henry had once behaved like the favored Jacob in embracing Protestantism but now acts more like Esau in returning to Catholicism, thus turning his back on true religion as Esau

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Tudor, "Letter 87: Elizabeth to Henry IV of France, July 1593," *Collected Works*, 370-371; written with corrections in the Queen's hand.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 371, n3.

forsook his birthright. She takes this action so seriously that she warns him that “the fear of God threatens us,” thereby implying that Henry demonstrates a reprobate nature by returning to Catholicism. This incident occurred late in her reign, and Elizabeth likely feared the loss of a religious ally, but again she treats the situation rhetorically as an historical manifestation of the theological doctrine of double predestination, under which she contrasts her own behavior—in this case, through the vehemence of her opposition—against the Esau-like qualities of her fellow prince. Treating the situation as a matter of spiritual life and death, she again asserts her own election, aligning herself—at least in the Protestant viewpoint—with Jacob, while Henry risks his own condemnation with the conversion.

Calvin likewise finds the story of Jacob and Esau to be proof of the doctrine of double predestination as well, writing in the *Institutes*: “While the children were not yet born nor had done good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not in works, but in Him who calls, it was said: ‘The elder will serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’”⁷² Calvin treats the story of the traded birthright as accomplishing God’s eternal choice, for God had already chosen to love Jacob and hate Esau long before they were born. For Calvin, the story of Jacob and Esau illustrates the certainty that humanity can do nothing to save themselves without God’s grace. For Elizabeth, the story defined Henry’s conversion as a sign that he, like Esau, was the reprobate and the hated son, although he had once seemed to mirror the

⁷² John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination*, 77.

image of Jacob. Her outrage against Henry becomes another marker that she is elect, as does her prayer that Henry realize the judgment to which he subjects himself and return to the Protestant faith.

In contrast to Henry's behavior—as characterized by the Queen—Calvin treats predestination as moving the elect back toward the state of divine perfection in which they had been originally created. He writes:

Now God's image is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection, but was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden. Therefore in some part it now is manifest in the elect, in so far as they have been reborn in the spirit; but it will attain its full splendor in heaven.⁷³

Thus he exposes the severity of the effects of the Fall, because it nearly erased the original “excellence” of human nature, which can only be partially recovered through the elect being reborn. Here again he blames humanity for the Fall, calling Adam's sin a “defection” from God's image that then, as he writes in other passages, gets passed down to all generations. Since original sin corrupts so thoroughly, the elect can only experience a partial restoration of “some part” of the original perfection on earth and must await the full restoration in heaven.

Elizabeth likewise expounds on the original perfection of human nature and the restoration enacted through election in an Italian prayer from the 1569 *Christian Prayers and Meditations* entitled “First Prayer as a Creature of God.” She writes:

Acknowledging, Lord, how I am Thy creature, created in Thy image and likeness, an excellent work of Thy hands above all the other creatures, I

⁷³ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 190.

render Thee infinite thanks for this, and I pray Thee humbly that it may please Thee so to grant that I may continually have care and regard not to sully nor to abase this Thy holy image restored in me through Jesus Christ, but instead keeping it pure and untainted by any carnal affection, may it reflect in the eyes of everyone the splendor of Thy face, which Thou hast bestowed upon me from above to Thy glory, through Jesus Christ, amen.⁷⁴

She places herself in a humble position, addressing God as His “creature” and “an excellent work of Thy hands.” She alludes to the biblical story of creation, in which God declares: “Let us make man in our image after our likeness, let them have rule of the fish of the sea, fowls of the air and cattle, and all the earth.”⁷⁵ Prior to the Fall, humanity reflected God’s “image” and “likeness”—so described in Elizabeth’s prayer—and, as such, exercised dominion over the rest of God’s creation (which of course, for Elizabeth, is reflected in her sovereignty over God’s English creatures).

Although she does not consider the Fall directly, she implies the alteration of her original nature by asking God’s help to keep undefiled the image “restored in me through Jesus Christ”—that “some part . . . now manifest in the elect,” in Calvin’s words. Implying that she can do nothing to restore herself, Elizabeth asks God to “grant” that His image be restored to her through Christ and that she does not “sully” or “abase” the image in which she had originally been created and is restored through Christ’s sacrifice. Only with God’s help, then, can she mirror “the splendor of Thy face” given to her by God in her restored image. Her constant plea for forgiveness and for God to preserve His restored image in her

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 17: First Prayer as a Creature of God,” *Collected Works*, 153.

⁷⁵ Genesis 1:26.

free from corruption implies the partial restoration of which Calvin directly speaks, for no matter how much she may now desire to reflect God's image, she is still powerless to do so on her own. If she had been fully restored to the divine image, she would already be perfect and therefore require no such assistance.

Elizabeth thus asserts her position as a member of the elect by writing that God has restored her image and creates, out of her fallen and corrupted nature, a reflection of His divine glory. She acquires spiritual power by depending upon God's mercy and expressing her own humility that this restoration must be accomplished through Christ's sacrifice and can be reflected in her only according to God's grace. As Calvin writes in his *Institutes*, "As our humility is his loftiness, so the confession of our humility has a ready remedy in his mercy."⁷⁶ Elizabeth expresses humility by repeatedly asking for God's image to be restored in her and to be protected from the taint of her natural corruption. She solidifies her position as one of the elect by expressing the desire that God's mercy in her life enable her to reflect the glory of His image, rather than any glory or majesty of her own. Of course, the audience cannot simply see God's election written on her face, but it is most certainly affirmed rhetorically in her prayers, empowering the Queen spiritually and politically as God's chosen vessel of honor.

Calvin uses the writings of Paul to expound further on the transformation that takes place in the lives of the elect:

When the apostle tells the Philippians he is confident "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" [Philippians 1:6], there is no doubt that through "the beginning of a good work" he denotes the very origin of conversion itself, which is in the will.

⁷⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 269.

God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness.⁷⁷

Since the human will has been so radically altered by the Fall, God must inspire “love and desire and zeal for righteousness” within the elect. Calvin makes clear that this is unnatural for depraved human beings, since God must “bend,” “form,” and “direct” the elect toward righteousness. But the elect feel the conversion taking place in that it inspires “love and desire and zeal for righteousness” where there is only otherwise sin.

Elizabeth also adopts this concept of needing God to change her will in a Latin prayer from the 1579-1582 prayer book. The *logos* of her argument, like that of Calvin’s, is that her mind is so diseased from natural corruption, God must guide her: “The frail body presses down upon the soul, and its earthly dwelling much hinders the thinking mind; nor does anyone born among men know Thy counsel or understand Thy mind, unless Thou has first given him wisdom and breathed upon him with Thy divine Spirit.”⁷⁸ Although she has established herself, as elsewhere, as a vessel of God’s mercy through election, Elizabeth still confesses to the weaknesses affecting her soul and mind. She separates the spiritual soul and the physical body, treating the soul as residing in a “frail” and “earthly dwelling” that “much hinders the thinking mind,” mirroring Calvin’s depiction of the diseased human reasoning as “overwhelmed by so many forms of deceptions . . . subject to so many errors, dashes against so many obstacles . . .

⁷⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 33: The Latin Prayer,” *Collected Works*, 317.

caught in so many difficulties, that it is far from directing us aright.”⁷⁹ As a result of her “frail body” and damaged reasoning, Elizabeth considers herself wholly dependant upon God to even know His will, let alone act according to it. It is interesting to note that in the Fall, Adam and Eve believed the temptation of the devil that they would be like God if only they ate from the forbidden tree and understood good and evil. Herein Elizabeth’s self-declared election reverses the Fall’s destruction of human understanding: Elizabeth does not seek wisdom on her own. Instead, God must impart it to her by “breathing upon him [or in this case, her] with Thy divine Spirit.”

Elizabeth prays that God restore her heart completely: “Give me, Thy handmaid, a teachable heart, so that I may know what is acceptable in Thy sight; send from heaven the Spirit of Thy wisdom and rule my heart with its guidance.”⁸⁰ Here again, as in other prayers, Elizabeth echoes the words of the psalmist David, who writes in Psalm 119: 33-35: “Teach me, O Lorde, the waye of thy statutes, and I shal kepe it unto the ende. Give me understandynge, and I shall kepe thy lawe; yee I shall kepe it wyth my whole herte. Make me to go in the path of thy commandmentes, for therein do I delyte.” David and Elizabeth, then, both use the metaphor of needing instruction (as if students) in God’s law, and must constantly ask the teacher (God) for guidance, thereby implying that their natural tendencies require divine correction. God must make the heart “teachable,” in Elizabeth’s words, and grant understanding—according to both

⁷⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 284.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 33,” 317.

David and Elizabeth—of heavenly wisdom and the expectations for how a godly person must live. Elizabeth then feminizes the notion by calling herself, as in many other places, God’s “handmaid,” using the word so often attached to Mary’s name, thus making herself a type of David and Mary. She gains credibility with her audience through such biblical parallels, and she confirms the Calvinist rationale that only God can restore the heart, mind, and entire being according to His law and image. Only with God’s help, then, can she live guided by God’s will, through “Thy divine spirit,” erasing the debauched self-image she creates with her recitation of her sins, which nonetheless continue while her soul occupies the “frail” and “earthly dwelling.”

Further along in the same prayer, she continues the Davidian theme of asking God’s help to behave in a manner consistent with His will: “May Thy Word, Lord, be a light to my eyes, a lamp to my feet, honey in my mouth, a song to my ears, a joy to my heart.”⁸¹ The first part of the quotation comes directly from Psalm 119:105: “Thy worde is a lanterne unto my fete, and a light unto my pathes.” She ties herself rhetorically to David once again in acknowledging that God must guide her to obey His law, implying that such action exceeds her capabilities. Although she cannot take even one step on her own, she lays out an expectation for her life as one of the elect: that she should delight in God’s word as expressed by the sensual depiction of “Thy word” as “honey,” “a song,” and “a joy.”

⁸¹ Ibid., 318.

From the comparison to sensual pleasure, Elizabeth shifts to treating God's word in more militant terms in this prayer, reflecting the sense of many Protestants that true religion was under siege in England and on the continent in light of the ongoing religious turmoil. She asks God for His Word to serve in her life as "a girdle of truth for my loins, a corselet of righteousness for my breast, a helmet of salvation for my head, a sword of the Spirit for my right hand, a shield of faith for my left, and for my whole body the armor of God."⁸² The Word becomes a girdle, "corselet" (interestingly, defined as protection for the torso or as an undergarment for women, allowing her to appear as a female warrior), "helmet," "sword," "shield," and the whole armor of God. Each one of these accoutrements of the warrior has a corresponding spiritual value: "truth," "righteousness," "salvation," the "Spirit," and "faith," respectively. This passage follows closely the portrayal of the ideal Christian warrior detailed by Paul in Ephesians 6:14-17. Writing, as she does, in the non-traditional role as head of the English state and governor of the church, Elizabeth adopts the characteristics of another traditional male role—the warrior. This would seem a far cry from the numerous confessions of her weaknesses and sins, yet Elizabeth projects an image of spiritual and physical strength, even though, as a woman, she would otherwise be expected to be silent, if not for her role as Queen (although some wished to silence her in this role, as well).

From putting on the armor of God, Elizabeth then returns to the more traditionally feminine theme of having her emotions stirred spiritually, again

⁸² Ibid.

presenting evidence that she is, in fact, a member of the elect. As in keeping with the earlier passages of the prayer, she requests that God order her emotions properly: “With love for Thee alone before all else, good Jesus, may my heart be aflame, may my memory flourish, may my reason be comprehending, may my mind be wise; may my whole soul be impassioned and my spirit exultant with joy.”⁸³ Thus she lays out the principle of how she envisions God inspiring the emotions of the elect: asking that “her heart be aflame,” that her “whole soul” be impassioned” and her “spirit exultant with joy.” Calvin presents such “love” for Christ as evidence of election, writing that by God’s “calling He causes [the elect] to begin to love Him who could do nothing but hate. . . . If all men are by nature enemies and adversaries of God, it is plain that by His calling alone are those separated out who put hatred aside and turn to love Him.”⁸⁴ Calvin makes explicit the distinction between humanity’s natural hatred of God and God’s calling the elect to love Him. Nevertheless, in taking stock of God’s work in her own life, Elizabeth asks God for the kind of love of Christ and exultation of spirit that characterizes the elect, hence demonstrating that she cannot feel this way on her own but requires, in Calvin’s word, God’s “calling” to properly order her emotions to express devotion to God.

According to Elizabeth’s conclusion of this prayer, such a changing of her heart and mind creates the proper relationship between the sinner being restored to the divine image and the Creator performing such work. The heart and mind

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 70.

are set right spiritually so “that I may follow Thee in Thy law as my Leader; hear Thee in Thy Word as my Teacher; love Thee as a Father for Thy promises; honor Thee as my King for Thy kindnesses; worship Thee in Thy works as my Creator; fear Thee in Thy threatenings as my Lord; embrace Thee in things well done as Thy servant; in all words, deeds, and thought glorify Thee.”⁸⁵ What a change one reads from Elizabeth’s recitation of the ways in which she offends God in her daily life! Rather than disobeying God’s word, she points to the characteristics of her restored relationship with God in which she declares her submission to God as her “Leader,” “Father,” “King,” “Creator,” and “Lord.” Though she is an earthly queen, she honors God as her sovereign and someone to whom she owes “honor,” “worship,” and “fear.” In fact, the proper treatment of God, according to Elizabeth’s prayer, is to glorify Him in everything she does. Here again, she follows Calvin’s model of self-renunciation in order to honor God, from whom everything good comes: “[W]e seek not the things that are ours but those which are of the Lord’s will and will serve to advance his glory.”⁸⁶ Elizabeth does not expect to do so on her own; rather, she asks God for the ability to treat Him properly, to respect Him as her ultimate authority, and to depend upon Him to purify her spiritually as evidence of her election. She does not portray herself as able to glorify God, but rather prays that He will order her life properly in order to do so, thus replacing her own natural tendency to seek her own glory in favor of

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 33,” 318.

⁸⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 690-691.

seeking God's through her devotion and the restoration of the divine image within her naturally corrupted soul.

And so, in her prayers, Elizabeth follows the Calvinist model of predestination under which God separates those destined for salvation and those marked for damnation, then restores—at least partially—the divine image of man's original creation. She remains ever cognizant of her weaknesses and natural tendency toward sinfulness as demonstrated by her constant pleas that transform her corrupted seed back toward the perfection of the original divine image. Calvin describes this process as follows:

It is as if it were said that the beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness. But no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate. Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun.⁸⁷

Elizabeth writes in her prayers of a restored inclination to seek God's glory despite her naturally depraved will, which, in Calvin's words, keeps her "wavering and limping" along, with the full restoration awaiting in heaven.

Elizabeth's discussion of the spiritual transformation in her life is not filled with her own deeds; rather, it entails asking God for the power to live according to His law and to seek after His glory. Confessing her sins and even her inability to do anything right on her own brings glory to God and places Elizabeth in a subservient position as a servant completely dependent upon His imputation of righteousness.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 688-689.

The rhetorical effect of tying herself so closely to God is one of spiritual empowerment. The prayers become a spiritual autobiography, one in which Elizabeth marks her progress and setbacks in the spiritual realm for all to see. Her prayers bear witness to God's mercy in action. She achieves this in confessing her sins, as according to Calvin's model, no one can have the right view of oneself without the work of the Holy Spirit. Then she identifies herself as a member of the elect, contrasting God's choice to save her against His decision to leave some princes under Satan's power. She also marks her election, following Calvin's model, by espousing a proper understanding of her relationship to God. Elizabeth's prayers, in this manner, become evidence of her election and of the work that the Holy Spirit perform to allow her to follow God's Word.

Elizabeth's self-representation confirms her spiritual authority as a member of the elect. God transforms her to recognize that she can do nothing to overcome her natural depravity and to recreate her as a reflection of His image. Thus she assigns a certain spiritual authority to herself, in a distinctly Calvinistic fashion, by admitting that God reigns supreme above her and restores her to her proper position as an obedient servant. She speaks as a recipient of God's mercy, and she exercises control over the ecclesiastical realm by presenting her prayers as models upon which her subjects should learn to pray and by demonstrating the doctrines of human depravity and predestination, as well as how each defines the spiritual life.

On the Royal Life

Having outlined a spiritual transformation—authored solely by God—from complete depravity to purification through election and faith, it should come as no surprise that Elizabeth describes her role as monarch in similar terms. In the context of the spiritual life, Elizabeth presents herself as utterly destitute of any good and deserving of damnation; regarding her royal life, she emphasizes her natural weaknesses and ignorance. She attributes many of her weaknesses to her gender, acknowledging some of the criticisms leveled at her and at women in general, and her self-representation makes her seem an unlikely queen. Nevertheless, she treats her natural weaknesses and the dangers she faces as evidence of God’s mercy in preserving her and appointing her Queen over England. According to Elizabeth’s treatment of salvation in her prayers, God chose her from all eternity to receive salvation and transforms her spiritually to glory Him; likewise, Elizabeth describes God as transforming her from a weak and endangered woman into a just and godly ruler commissioned to restore the Gospel in England.

Presenting herself in this manner as divinely ordained and commissioned, Elizabeth confronts her detractors who doubt her abilities and legitimacy in matters both ecclesiastical and political, and she equates her enemies with enemies of God Himself. She contributes to the argument on behalf of rule by divine right by presenting herself as specially protected and raised up by God Himself, providing a Protestant-style model monarch by acknowledging her weaknesses and by crediting God alone with choosing, anointing, protecting, and elevating her even in the midst of the dangerous plots of her enemies.

Just as she does in discussing the spiritual life, Elizabeth follows a pattern for royal government set forth by John Calvin. It has been said that Calvin disliked rule by monarchy, and indeed he writes far more favorably concerning democracy or even aristocracy, as he warns that “the transition is easy from monarchy to despotism.”⁸⁸ Still, Calvin considers God’s choice of a monarchy to rule over Israel and even describes King David—to whom Elizabeth consistently compares herself and from whom she quotes throughout her prayers—as a type of Christ. He further provides a model for a godly monarch, as John T. McNeill writes in the introduction to his edition of Calvin’s *Institutes*: “In a passage that reflects Augustine’s celebrated ‘mirror of princes,’ in which those emperors are called happy who ‘make their power the handmaid of God’s majesty,’ Calvin declares that it is ‘true royalty’ in a king to acknowledge himself ‘the minister of God,’ and that it is his duty to rule according to God’s Holy Word.”⁸⁹ As we shall see, this is exactly how Elizabeth discusses her reign and asks God to enable her to execute her royal duties.

On January 14, 1559, Elizabeth paused to speak at the Tower of London on her way to her coronation ceremony to be held the following day. According to an account written by Richard Mulcaster, Elizabeth offered a prayer at this site of her former imprisonment (now her royal possession) that blends autobiographical and biblical detail to support her claim of divine empowerment:

⁸⁸ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, ed. John T. McNeill (New York: Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1956), 44.

⁸⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, lxxv (from McNeill’s introduction).

O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast been so merciful unto me as to spare me to behold this joyful day. And I acknowledge that Thou has dealt as wonderfully and as mercifully with me as Thou didst with Thy true and faithful servant Daniel, Thy prophet, whom Thou deliveredst out of the den from the cruelty of the greedy and raging lions [Daniel 6:16-22]. Even so was I overwhelmed and only by Thee delivered. To Thee (therefore) only be thanks, honor, and praise forever, amen.”⁹⁰

Recalling her former imprisonment, Elizabeth thanks God for delivering her from her enemies and raising her to the throne, declaring that without God’s mercy, she would have been overwhelmed. At the beginning of her reign, she models herself after biblical figures, in this case, God’s “true and faithful servant” and “prophet” Daniel. She may not consider herself a prophet, but her self-comparison to Daniel reminds the public of the dangers she encountered coming to power and endows her rescue with godly purpose as another of God’s faithful servants.

Thus Elizabeth treats Daniel’s story as a demonstration of God’s protection of and faithfulness to His true servants. God shut the mouths of the lions in Daniel’s case, and He rescued Elizabeth when she had been held captive and accused of treason by those who opposed a Protestant successor to Mary. The Daniel story holds additional parallels for Elizabeth’s self-representation: Daniel was a Jewish captive in the court of Babylonian King Darius, whose favor towards Daniel had been resented by Darius’s advisors; Mary’s councilors long suspected Elizabeth to be a participant in Protestant plots against Queen Mary. Darius’s advisors convinced the King to enact a law that Daniel could not obey because it would prohibit his daily prayers; Elizabeth stood accused by Mary’s

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Tudor, “Speech 2: Richard Mulcaster’s Account of Queen Elizabeth’s Speech and Prayer during Her Passage through London to Westminster the Day before Her Coronation,” *Collected Works*, 55.

advisors of treason in part because of her religious leanings. Darius reluctantly threw Daniel into the lion's den but prayed for his safety; Mary imprisoned her sister but released her after a face-to-face interview in which Elizabeth proclaimed her innocence. Daniel's survival led to a decree by King Darius to worship Daniel's God; Elizabeth's ascension after Mary's death marked a return to Protestant-style worship. Daniel gained greater prominence at Darius's court following his divine rescue; according to Elizabeth, God raised her from prisoner to queen. An additional implication of the rhetorical construction is that those who oppose her rule risk God's wrath like that suffered by Darius's advisers, who were fed to the lions they had hoped would devour Daniel.

Elizabeth was not alone in such a self-representation. Although Elizabeth only briefly describes her feeling of being "overwhelmed" by dangers during Mary's reign, Foxe describes the dangers she faced as "extreme misery, sickness, fear, and peril," "what trouble of mind, and what danger of death she was brought," in "being fetched up as the greatest traitor in the world, clapped in the Tower, and gain tossed from thence, and from house to house, from prison to prison, from post to pillar . . . and guarded with a sort of cut-throats, which ever gaped for the spoil, whereby they might be fingering of somewhat." In fact, he likens her to Christ in his representation that she "could not escape without her cross."⁹¹ Foxe goes into more detail of Elizabeth's imprisonment, but John Calvin also writes of the dangers Elizabeth faced and her godly rescue in his dedication of an edition of his commentaries on Isaiah to the Queen: "[W]hat ought never to

⁹¹ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 604-605.

be forgotten by you, from what wretched and fearful trembling God rescued you, by openly stretching out His hand,” and “confirming [Elizabeth] in the image of his Son.”⁹² Therefore Calvin also participates in the modeling of Elizabeth’s life as one of divine rescue and purpose, crediting God with actively removing her from danger to mold Elizabeth in the image of Christ. Calvin undoubtedly had political reasons for his dedication, not the least of which was his desire to see his writings be published for an English audience. Nevertheless, his dedication and the story told by John Foxe support Elizabeth’s self-fashioning as an object of God’s mercy and His anointed Queen.

John Foxe’s work detailing the suffering of the English Protestants under Mary was published in 1563, and that same year, and the doctrinal statement of the church, the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, was approved by the bishops. Also that same year, a collection of the Queen’s prayers appeared in print after the Queen recovered from smallpox. In one collect from this volume, Elizabeth deals with God’s overcoming her natural weaknesses and allowing her to properly administer the kingdom. She begins by thanking God for His work in her life, particularly in choosing her to be Queen: “Almighty, eternal God, Lord of lords, King of kings, to whom is all power, who hast constituted me prince of Thy people and by Thy mercy alone hast made me sit on the throne of my father, I Thy handmaid am slight of age and inferior in understanding of Thy law.”⁹³ God, then,

⁹² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, ed. Rev. William Pringle, 2nd edition, vol. 1 dedication (1559), available at www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom13.html.

⁹³ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 6: A Collect,” *Collected Works*, 138.

is solely responsible for “constitut[ing] me prince” and allowing her to succeed her father. Interestingly, she skips over her half-brother (who was only king for a short time) and Mary (whom the Protestants considered a persecutor of the faithful).

In this prayer, Elizabeth describes herself as youthful and “inferior in understanding” of God’s law—both of which might seem, at first glance, to undermine her legitimacy. But just as she emphasized her depravity to highlight God’s mercy in discussing her spiritual life, her weaknesses both set the stage for God’s mercy and support her royal claims in that she argues only God could possibly raise such a weak and unlikely person to rule over England. In essence, she confronts critics like Knox and others by admitting she is weak, but her weakness confirms that God alone could have accomplished her elevation. Elsewhere in the prayer, she calls herself “queen on earth by Thy ordinance” and writes of God “who has chosen me Thy handmaid to be over Thy people that I may preserve them in Thy peace.”⁹⁴ Time and again she rhetorically empowers herself by her self-presentation as merely God’s servant or “handmaid,” serving out her responsibility of ruling over England by God’s command. The title “handmaid” carries weight by itself, given its association with Mary, who had been chosen through no distinction of her own to bring Christ into the world just as Elizabeth and others consider that she must bring the Gospel back to God’s people in England.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 138 and 139.

Elizabeth rhetorically humbles herself before God, just as she does in her prayers concerning her spiritual life, by asking Him to enable her to judge her people properly. This plea confronts accusations by Knox and others that as a woman she would be incapable of discerning what is right—let alone of ruling effectively—by admitting that she can only govern based upon divinely granted wisdom:

Give me, I pray, a teachable heart, that I may know what is acceptable before Thee at all times, that I may be able to judge Thy people justly, and discern between good and evil. Send from heaven the Spirit of Thy wisdom, that He may lead me in all my doings. Fill my heart with a sense of this; may Thy true wisdom give knowledge and counsel and understanding from Thy mouth.⁹⁵

She again echoes David's prayer that God give him a clean heart (Psalm 51:10) and teach Him what is right (Psalm 119:33-35). These lines confirm her reliance upon God for His counsel, and they empower her politically as she prays to be led by the Spirit, implying that she would otherwise lack the proper understanding to rule (just as she could do no good without the Spirit working a spiritual transformation within her). In addressing God as the One to grant true wisdom, she justifies her authority by aligning herself as God's student and servant, making judgments based solely on His instruction.

Praying for God's wisdom and counsel, Elizabeth presents a picture of a monarchy shaped by God that shares much in common with Calvin's representation of rule by kings. He writes: "[T]he authority possessed by kings and other governors over all things upon earth is not a consequence of the perverseness of men but of the providence and holy ordinance of God, who has

⁹⁵ Ibid., 138.

been pleased to regulate human affairs in this manner; for as much as he is present, and also presides among them, in making laws and in executing equitable judgments.”⁹⁶ Calvin argues not that all kings are godly, but rather that God “regulate[s] human affairs” in whatever manner He chooses. Elizabeth personalizes this notion in her prayer that God appointed her and that she requires His wisdom to, in Calvin’s words, “make laws” and execute “equitable judgments.”

As the 1563 collect continues, Elizabeth envisions an ideal kingdom in which God’s choice of monarch presides over the proper forms of worship:

Grant good shepherds, who may feed diligently from Thy Word Thy sheep committed to them, and that all ministers in zeal for justice may discharge their office for Thee. O my God, God of all power and mercy, govern all Thy people by Thy most holy Spirit, so that they may religiously worship Thee, excellent Prince and only Power, with true service; and may quietly be subject to me, their queen on earth by Thy ordinance; and may in obedience to Thee live together in mutual peace and accord.”⁹⁷

To an extent, this prayer reinforces the structure for worship dictated in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. In it, Elizabeth asks God to provide “good shepherds” to preach the Word and preside over the “worship” and “true service” of the English flock. Elizabeth also prays that her ministers will rule with justice, just as she had earlier prayed for herself. She marks her position as fulfilling God’s “ordinance,” and she details her expectation that her subjects “religiously worship Thee” and “be subject unto me.” Thus she makes explicit the political purpose of the prayer in asking God for an ideal kingdom in which she and her ministers lead the people

⁹⁶ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 48.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 6,” *Collected Works*, 138.

in proper worship according to God's Word and in which the people live in obedience and peace under her.

It is interesting to note in this particular passage that Elizabeth mentions herself only in the context of the people's obedience to God's will. The people must obey her, but she argues that they have a spiritual—as well as civic—duty to do so because God appointed her as His earthly representative. God changes her to live in accordance with His law; He must also enable the people to obey their “shepherds,” “ministers,” and “queen.” While she names herself “their queen on earth,” she emphasizes God's sovereignty far above hers, calling Him the “God of all power and mercy” and the “excellent Prince and only Power.” She may emphasize God's sovereignty over her, but she nevertheless reinforces her own position by claiming that this all-powerful God has specifically chosen her to rule over England. She thus conflates her subjects' obedience to her with submission to God's law. And, according to Elizabeth, the result will be a godly nation living in peace. This last argument would have been particularly crucial as the Queen sought to establish religious unity, and endowing it with divine favor and political peace makes the duty to obey the church even more critical.

Calvin similarly stresses the duty of subjects to obey their divinely appointed rulers: “For if it be [God's] pleasure to appoint kings over kingdoms, and senators or other magistrates over free cities, it is our duty to be obedient to any governors whom God has established over the places in which we reside.”⁹⁸ Notably, Calvin does not argue that the appointment of a ruler denotes his or her

⁹⁸ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 54.

godliness; rather, he considers it the duty of the people to obey since their rulers have been “established” by God. Additionally, Calvin treats rebellion against any ruler seriously: “[I]f those, to whom the will of God has assigned another form of government [than the democracy that he favors, that is], transfer this to themselves so as to be tempted to desire a revolution, the very thought will be not only foolish and useless, but altogether criminal.”⁹⁹ In the 1563 collect, Elizabeth only implies this principle by equating obedience to bishops, ministers, and the Queen with following God’s law, yet as her reign wore on and the threats against her multiplied, particularly from the Catholic faction, the treatment of outward disobedience became increasingly criminalized.

Elizabeth expands her vision of a godly kingdom in the 1563 collect, turning to God for assistance to faithfully execute her mission: “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.”¹⁰⁰ In this representation, Elizabeth imagines a kingdom unified by service to God. She may be Queen, but she treats her authority as bound by God’s Word, which she must follow with “care and diligence.” She also draws her audience in by arguing that she and they should be bound together by godly love and as members of one body, making the state a picture of the church. What matters most, then, under Elizabeth’s construction, is that all are bound in service to God: she must govern by God’s Word, and the people will be joined to her in the Spirit of divine love.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 6,” 138.

Having established the confines under which she must govern, Elizabeth further removes herself from the equation by highlighting God's power over princes, thus reaffirming her divine empowerment. She writes:

Be present, also, God most high, Governor and Ruler of every prince, by whom kings rule, to whom belongs all strength and an arm stretched out everywhere. God of peace and concord, who hast chosen me Thy handmaid to be over Thy people that I may preserve them in Thy peace, be present and rule me with the Spirit of Thy wisdom, that according to Thy will I may defend a Christian peace with all peoples.¹⁰¹

She applies divine power to her crown by establishing God as its author and praising Him as the only real source of power by which "kings rule," just as Calvin had written that kings rule by "the holy ordinance of God." She owes allegiance to God as her ultimate sovereign and as the source of her own sovereignty over England. And she confirms her formula for godly rule: to rule with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and to maintain peace and stability domestically and among other nations. Interestingly, while her parliaments and advisers urge her to marry to secure her kingdom, Elizabeth contends that only if she rules with godly wisdom will she be able to defend a "Christian peace with all peoples." Thus her avoidance of international conflicts becomes evidence of her ruling by God's wisdom and will. Elizabeth certainly confronted her fair share of conflict domestically and from the European continent throughout her reign, yet in this prayer she sets forth the ideal of defending "a Christian peace" through obedience to God. She implies, therefore, that if others stir up conflict internationally, they are clearly not reigning according to God's will.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 139.

Elizabeth ends the prayer by repeating her argument that because God anointed her, her duty is to obey His command: “Under Thy sovereignty, princes reign and all the people obey. Since Thou art the supreme King and Protector, may we all serve Thee in unity of spirit to Thy eternal glory.”¹⁰² Thus peace and unity depend upon both she and the people acting obediently toward God. Within the context of a prayer, she addresses God as the author of her power and the one to whom she owes all obedience, a point that helps her politically with the larger audience, as she confronts tension over her atypical role with constant reference to her submission to God. While she clearly prays as monarch, she nonetheless deflects any power from herself and onto God, quoting Proverbs 8:15-16 in the process: “Thorowe me, kynges reygne: thorowe me counselars make juste lawes. Thorowe me, do princes beare rule: and all judges of the earth execute judgement.” Elizabeth then draws the logical conclusions of divine empowerment, that the people are bound to obey princes set over them by God. Calvin also quotes these verses from Proverbs in the previously quoted passage concerning God choice of rulers. So both Calvin and Elizabeth agree that obedience goes hand-in-hand with the godly appointment of a ruler, thereby making it sinful, or “criminal,” in Calvin’s words, to disobey, so long as a ruler does not demand defiance of God’s law.

Thus Elizabeth sets forth the notion in her prayers that her royal life—like her spiritual life—owes everything to God and can be attributed to no power or merit of her own. On the one hand, she portrays herself as weak and lacking a full

¹⁰² Ibid.

understanding of God's law, yet she also establishes herself as God's appointee to rule over England and prays that God will grant her the mercy and His Holy Spirit to learn how to govern her subjects with justice. In her spiritual life, she must ask God for mercy to forgive her sins and to enable her to live according to His Word; in her royal life, Elizabeth likewise casts herself as completely dependent upon God for her elevation and for the ability to rule and judge God's people in England wisely. By highlighting her own power as God-given, she rhetorically places a divine imprimatur on her sovereignty, and she further eases doubts as to her legitimacy by describing herself in humble terms as God's "servant" and "handmaid," governing under God's dominion. By setting forth the notion of an ideal kingdom in which the monarch governs according to God's word and the subjects obey God's appointee, she places a spiritual obligation on her subjects to obey her.

Elizabeth addresses these same themes in "The Third Prayer" from the 1569 volume of prayers, published during the same year in which the plot to marry the duke of Norfolk to the imprisoned Mary, Queen of Scots, had been uncovered, and the revolt of the Northern earls defeated. Although these uprisings had been successfully quelled, they nonetheless demonstrated vividly that the Queen occupied a precarious position both internationally and domestically. And what better time could there be to reinforce her self-representation as a godly appointed queen whose power and governance depended on God's will? To her repetition of the principles of her particular rule by divine right, she also adds

biblical parallels to equate her enemies with the enemies of God and His chosen people.

In this prayer, Elizabeth acknowledges male criticism of females and sets herself up as an exception to the rule in terms of divine endowments. She establishes her virtue as divinely granted, thanking God “for the infinite mercies which Thou hast used toward me” in creating her in His image and for the reconciliation enabled by “the death and passion of Thy only Son Jesus Christ,” making her “Thy daughter, sister of Jesus Christ Thy firstborn and of all those who believe in Thee, who hope and trust in Thee.”¹⁰³ In this passage, she again confirms her calling as a member of the elect, or in this case, explicitly a member of “those who believe in Thee,” but also one with Christ in sharing God as their Father. This description denotes an altogether different relationship with God than her repetition of the term “handmaid,” because Christ’s death reconciles her to become an adopted daughter of God and sibling to Christ, alongside all believers. By establishing this kinship with Christ and the elect, Elizabeth admits that God has granted her virtue and mercy, making her a member of the faithful and a worthy governor of the church.

The Queen lists certain benefits from God that she describes as setting herself apart from other females, acknowledging criticism of females as the weaker sex:

[B]ecause Thou hast done me so special and so rare a mercy that, being a woman by my nature weak, timid, and delicate, as are all women, Thou hast caused me to be vigorous, brave, and strong in order to resist such a multitude of Idumeneans, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Muhammadans, and

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 22: Third Prayer,” *Collected Works*, 156-157.

other infinity of peoples and nations who have conjoined, plotted, conspired, and made league against Thee, against Thy Son, and against all those who confess Thy name and hold to Thy holy word as the only rule of salvation.¹⁰⁴

Historians have taken note that Elizabeth does very little to raise the status of women in general, instead rhetorically presenting herself as an exception, and this passage certainly bears that out. To take this self-presentation one step further, however, her discussion of generalized female weakness follows in keeping with her spiritual self-representation as tending only toward sin and depravity. Thus her construction of the traditional female acquires a distinctly Protestant twist: she is prone to the natural female tendencies to be “weak, timid, and delicate,” just as she tends, without God’s help, toward complete disobedience. In terms of the spiritual life, she discusses God’s changing her from naturally sinful to walking according to His law. In this case, while every female “by nature” is “weak, timid, and delicate,” God transforms her into an atypical female who is “vigorous, brave, and strong”—characteristics that make her a model monarch despite the weaknesses she argues are more common to her gender.

And why does God remake her in this manner? Elizabeth argues that it is because God raised her to confront a “multitude” of enemies, whom she compares to the biblical enemies of God’s chosen people. According to the Old Testament, the “Idumeneans, Ishmaelites, Moabites, [and] Muhammadans” attacked the Israelites but suffered judgment for doing so. These groups oppressed Israel for a time but ultimately were defeated because Israel had God on its side. Elizabeth, likewise, characterizes her unnamed enemies as plotting and conspiring against

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 157.

her, God's English people, and God Himself. She implicitly warns that her enemies risk God's wrath in attacking her efforts to fulfill God's will to establish the church in England, just as the enemies of Israel suffered for attempting to thwart God's plan for His people to occupy the land of Canaan.

In addition to likening herself and the company of English believers to the chosen people of the Bible, Elizabeth portrays herself as fulfilling scripture in God's choice of leaders. Elizabeth writes, "O my God, O my Father, whose goodness is infinite and whose power is immense, who art accustomed to choose the weak things of this world in order to confound and destroy the strong."¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth herein paraphrases a verse of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church: "But God hath chosen the folisshe thynges of the worlde, to confounde the wyse. And God hath chosyn the weake thynges of the worlde, to confounde thynges which are myghty."¹⁰⁶ As we have seen, she certainly does spend a good portion of her prayers portraying herself as foolish and weak, and now she presents her divine elevation as the fulfillment of God's plan to confound the wise and strong with His chosen vessel, no matter how naturally weak she may appear politically, spiritually, or otherwise. In spite of her natural shortcomings, God chooses her to be his servant and endows her with the strength to rule over those who might consider themselves superior to her. By describing herself as completely dependent upon His mercy and support to enable her to reign, she builds a case for her reign that is in keeping with the Protestant design for the spiritual life. Any

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:27.

confession of and sorrow for her sins depend upon her election; likewise, God's appointment transforms her from weak woman to strong ruler.

Elizabeth supports this self-portrayal as divinely appointed and specially endowed through biblical parallels to exceptional women whom God utilized to protect His people. She asks God to fashion her “like another Deborah, like another Judith, like another Esther,” so that she might “free Thy people of Israel from the hands of Thy enemies” and protect “the repose and quietude of Thine afflicted church.”¹⁰⁷ She asks for God to make her a capable defender of His people in the mode of the biblical women He similarly empowered: According to Judges 4 and 5, Deborah presided as judge over the people of Israel, even at one point urging the Israeli soldiers into battle to kill their enemies. Judith fasted and prayed before she murdered Holofernes, leader of the Assyrians—an act that led the Jewish soldiers to defeat their enemies. Esther risked her life to plead for the lives of her fellow Jewish captives before King Ahasueras. Elizabeth prays that God will use her to protect His English people against its enemies. Though she is admittedly weak, Elizabeth prays that God will strengthen her to stand against the enemies of His English church, just as her predecessors Deborah, Judith, and Esther protected the Israelites.

In his 1559 letter to Cecil, Calvin utilizes Deborah as an example of God raising up exceptional woman to serve His purposes: “[T]here were occasionally women so endowed, that the singular good qualities that shown forth in them made it evident that they were raised up by divine authority; either that God

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 22,” 157.

designed by such examples . . . for the better setting forth of his own glory. I brought forward Huldah and Deborah.”¹⁰⁸ So Calvin uses Deborah—as does Elizabeth, in her prayer a decade later—as a case of strong female rule over God’s people and as an argument to distance himself from Knox’s argument that female rule constituted a punishment of those governed. Calvin acknowledges that he wrote to Knox that female rule was “a deviation from the original and proper order of nature” and that it could be characterized as one of the “punishments consequent upon the fall of man,”¹⁰⁹ yet he allows for Elizabeth’s exceptionalism in the tradition of Deborah.

He also advocates that the preservation of God’s church should be the priority of any government, declaring: “[C]ivil government is designed . . . to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, to defend the constitution of the Church . . . and to establish general peace and tranquility.”¹¹⁰ So the government must preserve pure doctrine and the church itself—the duty Elizabeth considered herself to be fulfilling in the early years of her reign with the establishment of the new *Book of Common Prayer*, the definitive doctrinal statement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, and the discovery of Catholic conspiracies. Calvin does value establishing “general peace and tranquility” within a kingdom, but he places the defense of the church and its doctrines foremost among the responsibilities of governance.

¹⁰⁸ John Calvin, “John Calvin to Sir William Cecil,” 35.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 46.

Elizabeth adheres to the Calvinist model of governance in establishing and preserving the proper forms of worship, which for Calvin and Elizabeth meant the Protestant church. Elizabeth writes of her own weaknesses in order to portray herself as the exception in terms of God's favor and as a strong woman, modeled upon biblical women who risked their lives to protect God's people and allow the truth to prosper. Calvin likewise treats Elizabeth as specially endowed by God to establish and preserve the church despite God's traditional method of working through a male ruler. For both Calvin and Elizabeth, the biblical Deborah provides an example of God's advancing a naturally weak figure to preside as judge over His chosen people. While Calvin sought to reintroduce English publication of his works that had been banned under Mary, his portrayal nonetheless affirms Elizabeth's self-portrayals: he, too, sees Elizabeth as established by God for the benefit of the true church. Elizabeth empowers herself by acknowledging her natural weaknesses but also God's work to overcome them to combat His enemies and to preserve His chosen people and the church.

Elizabeth follows a similar rhetorical pattern in a prayer written in her own hand contained in the 1579-1582 prayer book. In this prayer, the Queen again treats her crown as granted by God despite her natural weaknesses and admits that she can only preside over the church and kingdom with God's mercy and empowerment. She treats God as her sovereign and writes of the English kingdom as dependent upon God's help to survive, just as she had written of her complete dependence upon God for her spiritual welfare.

Elizabeth begins this prayer, entitled “The First English Prayer,” by proclaiming her obedience to God as her sovereign: “O most glorious King and Creator of the whole world, to whom all things be subject both in heaven and earth, and all best princes most gladly obey, hear the most humble voice of Thy handmaid.”¹¹¹ She sets God above all princes and judges those princes as His subjects, according to whether they “gladly obey” Him—a standard by which her prayers mark her to be among the best princes. Demonstrating her adherence to this standard, she calls herself, once again, “Thy handmaid.” In repeating her title as God’s “handmaid,” inviting further comparison with Mary in that they both declare their readiness to serve God’s will. For Mary, this meant bearing Christ to accomplish God’s purpose of bringing salvation to fallen humanity; for Elizabeth, the mission is to restore the Gospel to England in order to call the elect to salvation and the proper practice of religion, at least from the Protestant point of view.

Elizabeth also expresses gratitude for the blessings God bestows on her in such a way that testifies to God’s favor of her:

How exceeding is Thy goodness and how great mine offences! Of nothing hast Thou made me not a worm, but a creature according to Thine own image; heaping all the blessings upon me that men on earth hold most happy; drawing my blood from kings and my bringing up in virtue; giving me that more is, even in my youth knowledge of Thy truth.¹¹²

The passage begins, as is typical with Elizabeth, with a confession of her unworthiness and the depth of God’s mercy. She thanks God for choosing to

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 30: The First English Prayer,” *Collected Works*, 311.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 312.

create her not as a lowly worm, but as a princess and to raise her “in virtue” to learn “Thy truth.” The latter point sets her apart from most women at this time, who had no access to education. Elizabeth, on the other hand, had been raised in a religious environment, translating, among other works, a chapter of Calvin’s *Institutes* and prayers of her stepmother Katherine Parr. In this case, she applies Calvin’s admonition to brag of God’s mercy before men to her virtuous and privileged upbringing. Her virtue thereby becomes instilled through God’s choice to prepare her as a model sinner, monarch, and defender of the church.

Calvin also wrote of the notion of divine empowerment for kings in his commentaries on biblical passages authored by David and Daniel. He writes: “[W]hen David exhorts kings and judges to kiss the Son of God [Psalm 2:10-12], he does not command them to abdicate their authority and retire to private life, but to submit to Christ the power with which they are invested, that he alone may have the pre-eminence over all.”¹¹³ Elizabeth does just that in her prayer from the 1579-1582 collection: she first proclaims God as the sovereign over everything under heaven, then illustrates God’s hand in her virtuous education in order to fulfill His purpose to raise a godly queen. Similarly, Calvin reflects on Daniel’s treatment of kingship, writing, “[C]onsider with attention what is so frequently and justly mentioned in the Scriptures—the providence and peculiar dispensation of God in distributing kingdoms and appointing whom he pleases to be kings. Daniel says, ‘God changeth the time and the seasons: he removeth kings and setteth up kings.’ Again: ‘That the living may know that the Most High ruleth in

¹¹³ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 49.

the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.’”¹¹⁴ So just as Elizabeth treats her upbringing as part of God’s plan, Calvin writes of the appointment—and deposition—of thrones as dictated by God’s will.

Daniel wrote those words while in captivity with many of his fellow Israelites, and Elizabeth likewise recalls her imprisonment to demonstrate that God alone could have accomplished His will for Elizabeth to rule over England: “[G]iving me . . . in times of most danger, most gracious deliverance; pulling me from the prison to the palace; and placing me a sovereign princess over Thy people of England.”¹¹⁵ Not only did God need to overcome her natural weaknesses and sins, as well as tailor her youthful education to virtue and truth, but He also rescued her from prison and placed her on the throne—further proof of His ability to accomplish His will and of Elizabeth’s role as His hand-picked servant, despite what might seem like insurmountable odds. As an royal prisoner, Elizabeth surely felt powerless against the wishes of Queen Mary and the royal advisers, yet Elizabeth explains her elevation through God’s providence, which supports her legitimacy on the basis of God’s will.

While Calvin used general terms of monarchy on his commentary on Daniel, he applies the principle directly to Elizabeth in his dedication of his commentaries on Isaiah:

[W]hen even you, though a king’s daughter were not exempted from that dreadful storm which fell with severity on the heads of all the godly, by the wonderful manner in which he brought you out safe, though not unmoved by the fear of danger, he has laid you under obligation to devote

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 75. The biblical quotes are from Daniel 2:21 and 4:17.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 30,” 312-313.

yourself and all your exertions to his service. So far are you from having any reason to be ashamed of this deliverance that God has given you large and abundant grounds of boasting, by confirming you to the image of His Son, on whom the Prophet Isaiah bestows this among other commendations, *that from prison and judgment* (Isaiah 53:8) he was raised to the loftiest height of heavenly dominion.¹¹⁶

Calvin treats her rescue as accomplished solely by God, and he urges Elizabeth to publicly and frequently proclaim it as such, which she does throughout her prayers. He also draws a parallel between Elizabeth and Christ in quoting Isaiah, who had prophesied that Christ would be raised from prison and judgment (on earth and in hell) to the heights of heaven for fulfilling His mission to bring salvation to the world. Elizabeth's rescue occurs in a much more worldly fashion, but Calvin treats it as evidence that God has recreated Elizabeth in the image of Christ and reserved an earthly crown for her so that she might restore the Protestant vision of the Gospel to England and thereby afford others the opportunity to be called to salvation.

Likewise, Elizabeth outlines a godly mission for which God raised her to earthly dominion: "Above all this, making me (though a weak woman) yet Thy instrument to set forth the glorious Gospel of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ."¹¹⁷ She again acknowledges that she has been so ordained in spite of her weakness (here, as elsewhere, associated with her gender). While men may criticize her based on gender, she uses this perceived weakness as a strength, as it demonstrates God's power to fashion His "instrument to set forth the glorious Gospel" even from such an unlikely creature. By arguing that she must "set forth the glorious Gospel," she

¹¹⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on Isaiah*, dedication.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayer 30," 313.

also implies that it had been banished, just as Calvin wrote of Mary's reign as a time of the "wretched and lamentable dispersion of the Church and oppression of pure doctrine, which raged with prodigious violence for a short time."¹¹⁸

Indeed, Elizabeth goes even further to apply similarly dark times to her depiction of the present day, not just to Mary's reign. She describes the state of the church as under assault and thus in grave need of God's "instrument" to set forth the Gospel:

Thus in these last and worst days of the world, when wars and seditions with grievous persecutions have vexed almost all kings and countries round about me, my reign hath been peaceable and my realm a receptacle to Thy afflicted Church. The love of my people hath appeared firm and the devices of mine enemies frustrate.¹¹⁹

For the Protestant Queen, it could easily have seemed that religion was indeed under assault, with the ongoing religious conflicts raging at home and abroad during the 1570s. Elizabeth asserts that the worst of these problems take place in foreign countries while she presides over a generally peaceful nation, which has become a "receptacle to Thy afflicted church." This last phrase perhaps alludes to the return of the Protestants exiles of Mary's reign, including many who had spent time in Geneva and brought back with them the influence of Calvinism. By contrast, Elizabeth presents her kingdom as a place in which the Gospel can once again thrive. She accentuates the dangers faced by the church in describing the time period as "these last and worst days of the world," and she portrays God's favor to His Queen through a peaceable realm and the love of her people, even

¹¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on Isaiah*, dedication.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Tudor, "Prayer 30," 313.

though it may be surrounded by “wars and seditions with grievous persecutions” in other lands.

Elizabeth defines her purpose as a godly Queen in precisely the same manner that Calvin presents the ideal monarch: as champion of the Gospel and defender of the true church. He writes: “[T]he principal commendations given in the Scripture to the good kings are for having restored the worship of God when it had been corrupted or abolished, or having devoted their attention to religion, that it might flourish in purity and safety under their reigns.”¹²⁰ Just as Elizabeth commends princes who happily obey God, Calvin writes that scripture praises those rulers whose reigns reestablish or reintroduce the Gospel to their nation state. Having reestablished the Protestant church in England, Elizabeth could reasonably lay claim to having fulfilled the mission of the ideal monarch (as set forth by Calvin) in her prayer some twenty years later. Calvin advises that Elizabeth fulfill the dictate of Isaiah 49:23 that kings be “nursing-fathers” and queens be “nursing mothers” of the Gospel to their subjects by removing Catholicism from England and by reforming the church. He also argues that the Queen’s main motivation should be “to promote religion, which has fallen to shameful neglect.”¹²¹

Following a reminder to her readers that she is inherently sinful and depends upon God’s grace continually, Elizabeth concludes her prayer, calling

¹²⁰ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 54.

¹²¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on Isaiah*, dedication.

God her only comfort and asking Him to empower her to govern justly over her kingdom:

Order my steps in Thy Word, that no wickedness may have dominion over me; make me obedient to Thy will, and delight in Thy law. Grant me grace to live godly and to govern justly, that so living to please Thee and reigning to serve Thee, I may ever glorify Thee, the Father of all goodness and mercy, to whom . . . be all praise, dominion, and power.¹²²

Elizabeth again reminds her readers—not to mention her direct audience of God—that she is, as ever, dependent upon Him in every step of her life. In order to truly be “Thy instrument” to defend the Gospel in England, God must “order” her steps, “make [her] obedient to Thy will,” and cause her, an admitted law-breaker, to “delight in Thy law.” As in every prayer, she places herself in a subservient role to God, claiming no power for herself but rather asking that God will direct her so that she will not, as she would otherwise remain “under the power of Satan,” as she contends other princes do. God’s grace, therefore, places her in a position of authority but must also direct her execution of the divine mission. Elizabeth rhetorically empowers herself by declaring that God has all dominion but has chosen to grant her earthly power as well.

Thus Elizabeth again fashions her self-image of the ideal ruler created in keeping with Calvin’s ideal governors: “[I]f they remember that they are vicegerents of God, it behooves them to watch with all care, earnestness, and diligence, that in their administration they may exhibit to men an image, as it were, of the providence, care, goodness, benevolence, and justice of God. . . . [I]f they fail in their duty, they not only injure men by criminally distressing them, but

¹²² Elizabeth Tudor, “Prayer 30,” 313.

even offend God by polluting his sacred judgments.”¹²³ Godly rulers must, therefore, realize that they are appointed and empowered by God alone, and their divine appointment requires them to present a godly image by acting justly and compassionately. Calvin also makes rulers subject to God’s judgment if they fail to rule justly and fulfill the task for which God has appointed them. Elizabeth reserves talk of God’s judgment, for the most part, to discussions of her sinful life; nevertheless, she pleads with God for the justice and wisdom to rule over England and to preserve the Gospel—the mission that she considers to be her main task as Queen and for which Calvin holds all rulers responsible.

Conclusion

What image do the prayers represent of Elizabeth Tudor? J. P. Hodges, for one, assesses her prayers as follows: “They convinced me that over the years historians have mainly been wrong in their estimate of Elizabeth as lacking any deep religious convictions—a verdict reached only by dismissing contrary evidence as dissimulation.”¹²⁴ Christopher Haigh writes: “It is true that in her prayers she dressed herself as she would like God to see her, rather than as she actually was. . . . But her self-image was as patroness of the Gospel, and she took her religious duties seriously.”¹²⁵ William P. Haugaard offers that the prayers “add an

¹²³ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, 51.

¹²⁴ J. P. Hodges, “Foreward,” *A Book of Devotions Composed by Her Majesty Elizabeth*, trans. Adam Fox, (Gerards Cross, United Kingdom: Colin Smythe Limited, 1970), 9.

¹²⁵ Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 31.

understanding of spiritual depth and unity to her character that has too long been missing.”¹²⁶

It is difficult to ascertain the Queen’s exact personal religious beliefs more than four hundred years after her death. Yet the rhetorical effect of the prayers is to create an image of the Queen as a model sinner and monarch within the Calvinist framework. In terms of the spiritual life, the Calvinist doctrine of sheer human depravity infuses her recitations of her many sins—sins that, in keeping again with Calvinist theology, she claims to recognize solely based on God’s choice to grant her this self-knowledge. Her spiritual accounting thus becomes evidence of another claim in the Calvinist tradition, that she has been chosen by God as a member of His elect and therefore awaits eternal salvation. In the royal life, Elizabeth represents herself again as an object of God’s mercy—as seen in her privileged upbringing and her rescue from the dangers of imprisonment during Mary’s reign and from the various assassination plots she faces as Queen. According to Elizabeth’s self-representation, God overcomes her natural tendencies and weaknesses to establish her as Queen and the instrument by which He restores the Gospel in England.

Elizabeth argues on behalf of her moral character by first emphasizing, as does John Calvin for humanity in general, that she is full of corruption and sin. She continuously agonizes over her many sins against God, rehearsing the doctrine of original sin common to both Protestant and Catholic traditions and confessing its affects in her daily life. Her sins, though laid out only in general

¹²⁶ William P. Haugaard, “Elizabeth Tudor’s *Book of Devotions*,” 103.

terms, consist wholly of her own actions, and she considers herself worthy only of God's judgment as a result.

This recitation of her sins and their just end testify to God's mercy in that she could not recognize her sorry state without it. According to Elizabeth's account, predestination enables her to be spiritually transformed in her earthly life—though she is careful to admit that she never stops sinning—and to eventually be granted eternal salvation. Elizabeth's Protestant-style confessions demonstrate God's grace transforming her so she can not only admit sin, but begin to obey His will and thereby reflect His image.

Thus Elizabeth lays out the tenets of salvation and the spiritual life in distinctly Protestant terms, designing not only a series of personal conversations with God but also a public record of her spiritual and royal journey. For the reading audience of her published prayers, she provides a model of how to pray that is shaped by Calvinist doctrine on total human depravity and predestination. Using a combination of scriptural references, liturgical glosses from the *Book of Common Prayer*, and her own contemplation of human life alongside that of other theologians, Elizabeth fashions her journey to salvation as a sinner who can do nothing to earn salvation but who is completely transformed by God's election.

The Queen likewise applies these similar terms to her royal life, promoting a vision of her reign in which God chooses a weak and frail woman to restore the Gospel in England—a mission that Calvin lays out for all rulers and specifically for Elizabeth in his dedication accompanying his commentaries on Isaiah. She lays bare her own weaknesses that would seem to argue against any ability on her

part to reign in terms similar to those she uses to describe her spiritual depravity. Because many men at the time—most notably John Knox—felt that female rule represented God’s judgment on a sinful nation, she confronts their arguments by acknowledging some validity to them, casting many of her natural human weaknesses in gendered terms. But as in the case of her spiritual life, these weaknesses prove that God is more powerful and wiser than the men who assail her rule can fathom in that He elevates her in spite of them and accomplishes His will by overcoming them. Calvin, Foxe, and Elizabeth herself create a story of God’s ability to elevate up a weak woman from the prison to the palace in order to protect His true church. And Elizabeth ultimately portrays herself as operating under God’s sovereignty as merely His servant or “handmaid” to bring the Gospel back to England.

This divine mission follows Calvin’s vision of an ideal monarch. Both Calvin and Elizabeth justify her authority on the basis of her divine appointment. Thus the Protestant iconography of Elizabeth as God’s chosen instrument to bring the Gospel back to England takes shape, and nowhere does it find a stronger advocate than the Queen herself. She constantly writes of religious reform as the main purpose for her reign, and she represents her own story, in terms of Calvinist rhetoric, as merely a servant to God’s purpose to save the English people.

Thus the prayers function as a defense of her spiritual life and of her reign. Elizabeth casts herself in the worst possible light as a consistently disobedient creature of God who has so far departed from her original divine state that she can no longer do any good and can only expect eternal damnation. Nevertheless, God

saves her and demonstrates His mercy in restoring her to reflect the divine image in her spiritual life and establishing her as Queen to rebuild the Protestant church in England. Elizabeth indeed presents a powerful self-portrait depicting God's providence in saving a sinful and condemned soul and raising a weak woman to the throne of England to fulfill His plan to call His chosen English people to salvation through proper worship and preaching of the Gospel.

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