CHAPTER FOUR

‘THAT OUTRAGEOUS PAMPHLET’:
OBEEDIENCE AND RESISTANCE, C. 1553–1558

In this chapter we turn to the reign of Mary and the political teachings of evangelicals who opposed her regime. The previous three chapters have made it clear that, prior to Edward’s death in 1553, the doctrine of obedience was widely accepted and vigorously defended. Yet historians have rightly noted that resistance theory featured in a number of Marian texts. These new ideas require explanation, and historians have devoted a substantial amount of time to searching for the origins of English evangelical resistance theory.

The most common theory alleges that during the Marian exile evangelicals were drawn towards continental radicalism, and that the doctrine of obedience was purged as a result of exile and suffering. Marian resistance, then, is traditionally seen as an appropriation of Calvinist political thought, or of Protestant theology in general.1 Though such theories have come under scrutiny, historians continue to endorse the basic view that English evangelicals radicalised under Mary as a result of their contact with continental Protestant leaders. The exile is depicted as a pilgrimage to the radical Reformed centres of Europe—to Geneva and Zurich.2 Examples of this trend can be found in Gerald Bowler’s work on resistance theory and Richard Greaves’ study of Knox and Bullinger, both of which endorse, at least in part, this account of Marian resistance theory. Greaves, in particular, repeats some of Walzer’s conclusions, though he focuses on Bullinger and Zurich. Bowler, on the other hand, distorts resistance theory by confusing the relationship between passive disobedience and active

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resistance, and by misunderstanding the wider European context of resistance during the 1550s.

This chapter seeks to reassess resistance theory under Mary and to explore the fate of the doctrine of obedience during the 1550s. Its argument is that Tudor historians have misunderstood the nature of English evangelical radicalism under Mary. The problem lies not in the claim that English evangelicals adopted resistance theory in the 1550s, but in the misreading of the context of these developments and their relationship to ‘Calvinism’. The goal here, then, is to set Marian resistance theory in its immediate political and intellectual context. I will argue that evangelicals who adopted resistance theory were going against the grain of Reformed political thought during the 1550s, and they were diametrically opposed to the thinking of Tudor evangelicalism. These resistance writers were more radical, more populist, and more revolutionary than most of their European counterparts. First, we will examine the earliest teachings on obedience and resistance under Mary, in an effort to determine their provenance. The earliest arguments for resistance, I will argue, relied heavily on Lutheran ideas, or were developed independently. Secondly, we will examine the Frankfurt ‘troubles’ and the rupture between the ‘Knoxians’ and ‘Coxians’ over resistance theory. Thirdly, we will study the political ideas of Peter Martyr and John Ponet, both published in Strasbourgh. And finally, we will look at Goodman’s work in Geneva and his influence on the Geneva Bible.

The Continental Context of Marian Resistance

Before we examine resistance theory from the 1550s, however, it is necessary to understand the context of evangelical political thought during Mary’s reign. The vast majority of evangelical leaders who fled to England settled in Swiss cantons or in imperial free cities along the Rhine, areas most influenced by Reformed theology and increasingly hostile to Lutheran influence. This was due in part to the close relationship between evangelical and Reformed leaders. But it is often underappreciated the extent to which Lutheran cities rejected the Marian exiles and refused to shelter them. Mary’s choice to marry Philip of Spain, Charles V’s son and heir, meant that evangelicals were at odds with the Holy Roman Empire, and thus, the exile community was a political liability for German princes. Many Lutheran rulers were unwilling to accept English refugees who openly opposed the Anglo-Habsburg alliance, and who published tracts against Mary and Philip. In one case, when a group of evangelicals arrived