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Review of A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the  
Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth,  
1558-1585*

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A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth, 1558-1585*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ix + 272 pp. \$54.95. ISBN: 0-521-65144-1.

A. N. McLaren's study of political culture in the first part of the reign of Elizabeth is a thoughtful and thoroughly researched study that deals with the connections between ideology and politics, on how concepts of hierarchy, patriarchy, and commonwealth changed in the reign of Elizabeth I. McLaren places her work within a strong historiographical context that particularly follows the scholarship of John Guy and Patrick Collinson while also imposing Anthony Fletcher's "lens of gender." McLaren places the debate on queenship within a broad context and argues that it led not only to the 1601 Essex rebellion but eventually to critiques on kings as well and the execution of Charles I in 1649. By the middle of the

seventeenth century arguments against queen as sovereign had become applicable to an English male incumbent of the crown.

McLaren makes a compelling case that we need to look at the changed conception of monarchy under Henry VIII and the Reformation to understand arguments over sovereignty later in the century. Henry VIII had transformed the meaning of kingship when he defined England as an empire and himself as Supreme Head of the Church of England. After a boy king, an attempted coup, and an attempt to restore Catholicism under a queen, Elizabeth's accession to the throne in 1558 created a crisis of legitimacy to the English political nation. Under Mary radical Protestant critiques of kingship coalesced with arguments against women's rule. McLaren does not give Mary I enough credit for her strength early in her reign, but she does argue convincingly that the view of monarchy as ungodly and at war with the common good that developed in the reign of Mary I was reformulated but not repudiated in the reign of Elizabeth. McLaren demonstrates that while Knox and Aylmer were on different sides of the queenship debate, there were actually more similarities than differences in their arguments. Aylmer's theory of "mixte ruler" would mean that Elizabeth did not really exercise sovereignty, and McLaren argues that within the context of female rule more and more men — men, not women — had to re-invent themselves as "citizens," a definition that more traditionally has been not applied until the seventeenth century and the struggles between king and Parliament.

Though McLaren provides some interpretations of the impact of these ideologies into the seventeenth century, she sees the 1584 Bond of Association as the watershed between the two parts of Elizabeth's reign and wishes to concentrate on this first period. Most of her book is concerned with the interaction between ideological conviction and the political necessity that shaped the Elizabethan body politic and determined the relations between Elizabeth and her subjects from the beginning of her reign to the mid-1580s. As well as Knox and Aylmer, she also especially useful in her analysis of the writings of Sir Thomas Smith and the 1576 parliamentary speeches of Peter Wentworth.

The research for the study and the analysis are both first rate, though occasionally McLaren's writing style becomes pretentious, making the book less accessible. Readers should persevere, however, as *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I* asks scholars to think about the connections between ideology and politics in new and important ways.

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