

**The Motives, Causes, and Results of the Henrician Reformation: A  
Brief Inquiry**

by  
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## **Introduction**

When Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses in 1517, he was expressing genuine outrage at the practice of selling indulgences, with the purchaser being rewarded with eternal life. For Luther, this bartering with God's grace was unbiblical, and something that the pope would never approve. He turned out to be mistaken, and ended up drawing the ire of the pontiff and earning himself an excommunication for his protest. In the midst of the debate, through pamphleteering and popular oratory, Luther captured the imagination of his people, and moved their hearts and consciences by passionate appeal to biblical, theological principles. He was not a politician, a royal, nor an eminent clergyman; he was merely an Augustinian monk (albeit a doctor of theology) with a zeal for the purity of the church and the gospel.

Ulrich Zwingli was educated in Bern, Vienna, and Basel then served first in a parish in Glarus, during which time he studied Augustine, and then, as a priest in a Benedictine monastery in Einsiedeln. During his education he came under the influence of some of the leading humanist scholars of his day and by 1516 had determined that the church was in need of humanist reform. He became priest at the Great Minster in Zurich in 1519 and shocked the city by preaching from the Scriptures against many of the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church. The first major public act of ecclesiastical defiance by the Zurich reform movement happened in February 1522, when they met together at the house of the publisher Froschauer to eat sausages, breaking the Lenten fast. The city council held a public disputation in 1523 where Zwingli attempted to hold his own against the local Roman Catholic priests. While Zwingli clearly won the debate, the council did not take immediate action. Although Zwingli was willing to work slowly and patiently with the authorities over reform, some radicals took matters into their own hands resulting in iconoclasm. This precipitated a second debate in October of 1523, after which the council officially determined to make Zwingli's Scripture-based reform the policy of the city. Over the next few years, images were removed from churches, the

monasteries were closed, and in 1525, the mass was abolished.<sup>1</sup> Soon other cities adopted a similar program of reform based on the example of Zwingli and Zurich.<sup>2</sup>

These two reforms represent what is known as the Protestant Reformation: Luther with his attempt at reform from within that produced, essentially, a mix of old and new church beliefs and practices, and Zwingli's complete overhaul of the entire system, creating the Reformed church. What links them is the fact that they were not, at least initially, forced down by either the secular ruling authority, or by some ecclesiastical body. These reforms were brought about by people who had to make appeal to authority for them to be officially sanctioned.

If one compares the above accounts of the primary Reform movements of the sixteenth century with the English Reformation<sup>3</sup>, it appears that the events surrounding Henry VIII's separation from Rome and the subsequent political and ecclesiastical measures were of an entirely different nature. While in Europe reform was pressed upon the authorities from below, it seems that in England reform was forced down from above, and took much longer to take hold. It also appears that the initial impetus to reform came primarily as a result of political and personal grievances as opposed to theological conviction. This might explain why the resulting church of England was (and in many respects continues to be) a Protestant church unlike any other Protestant church to come out of Europe: not Reformed, and yet not Lutheran.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the origins of the English Reformation, looking at its foundation and development through the reign of Henry VIII. It will pay attention to the attitude of the people, whether there was a "call for reform"<sup>4</sup> from the

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<sup>1</sup> This summary was drawn mostly from Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pp. 91-93; and Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 318-328.

<sup>2</sup> Hamburg, for example, held Zurich-like disputations prior to their reformation. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, as is often noted in works on the subject, it is probably more accurate to speak of English Reformations, since the attempts at reform under each successive monarch from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I were different from one another—in Mary's case, radically so.

<sup>4</sup> The title of the first chapter in G. R. Elton's work, *Reform & Reformation: England, 1509-1558*, which, to a great extent, follows the traditional view of the English Reformation. This view, as noted in this paper, sees the English Reformation as an inevitability based on rising anticlericalism and the influence of the Lollards and ideas filtering over from the Continent, as well as the social and political conditions of

general populous, whether they were opposed to reform, or whether they were largely indifferent to the idea. This paper will also look at the nature of Henry VIII's reform, its basis and motivations, asking whether Henry was driven by piety or politics, and how much his personality affected his approach to the church.

### **Christianity in Britain to the Late Middle Ages**

“[O]n the whole, English men and women did not want the Reformation and most of them were slow to accept it when it came.”<sup>5</sup> This is the conclusion Professor Scarisbrick came to as a result of his study into the attitudes of the English people both on the eve of the Reformation and in the years following. His opinion is shared by other notable historians<sup>6</sup> who, over the past twenty years have sought to review—and revise—much of what has been said previously concerning the English Reformation and particularly the common people's reaction to it. Such judgments are, however, notoriously hard to make with any degree of certainty. One cannot truly know the hearts of people, especially those who lived more than five hundred years ago, and both words and deeds may have non-religious motivations, even though the actions may be directed for or against religious institutions. It is the view of this writer that to understand the relationship between the English people and the Christian faith one must go back to its roots in the foundation of Christianity in the British Isles, and especially the historical relationship between Britain and Rome.

### *The Roman Invasion to the Norman Conquest*

The religious beliefs and practices of the British people prior to the Roman invasion were certainly pagan, but there is not much more that can be said for certain beyond the artifacts left for posterity (the famous Stonehenge, for example), and the tales

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the country at the time.

<sup>5</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1984), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Haigh, Ronald Hutton, and D. M. Palliser to name a few.

of Druids and sacrifices—even human sacrifices—to mysterious deities.<sup>7</sup> A major reason for this ambiguity is the fact that early British society was illiterate, and hence there are no written records to document their lives.<sup>8</sup>

The Roman invasion of Britain did not happen at once. Julius Caesar made a couple of attempts in 55 and 54 B.C., and Aulus Plautius turned his attention there in A.D. 43. He was followed by Ostorius Scapula and Suetonius Paulinus, and others until by the time the Emperor Severus entered the country in 209-211 A.D., the country was under Roman rule. While not yet sanctioned by the Empire, it is known that Christianity had already reached Britain by this time. Both Tertullian (c. 160-220) and Origen (c. 185-254) mention that the gospel had reached that barbarian island,<sup>9</sup> and three British bishops are known to have attended a council in Arles in southern Gaul early in the fourth century.<sup>10</sup> Even prior to the missionary efforts of Rome after Christianity became the official Imperial faith, it is clear that Christians were active in the British Isles. There were Celtic churches in the north and west parts of the country; missionaries were known to travel from Scotland and Ireland to the European continent, and some evidence exists of churches that stood on Anglo-Saxon soil prior to the sixth century.<sup>11</sup> One of the most significant people to enter into the life of Augustine of Hippo in the early part of the fifth century was the British monk Pelagius, who is the earliest Christian<sup>12</sup> British writer known to historians today.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sir George Clark, English History: A Survey (London, England: Book Club Associates, 1978), pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Chadwick, The Early church, 18<sup>th</sup> reprint (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987), p.63.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity Volume I: Beginnings to 1500 (Peabody, Ma: Prince Press, 1997), p. 78. Chadwick also mentions that British bishops attended the council of Ariminum in 359, and three of them were too poor to pay their own travelling expenses (Chadwick, The Early church, p. 63).

<sup>11</sup> David Wilson, The Anglo-Saxons 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 48; Clark, English History: A Survey, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Since Pelagius was a heretic, the application of the term “Christian” is meant in the sense that he came from within the Christian tradition. His theology undoubtedly put him outside the Christian belief system, however.

<sup>13</sup> Chadwick, The Early church (p. 64).

The mission to the British was in many ways a personal cause for pope Gregory I, having witnessed Angle boys being auctioned as slaves in Rome and desiring to secure the salvation of these angelic children. In 596, he sent the Benedictine monk Augustine with twelve men to Britain to achieve this goal.<sup>14</sup> These men were also assisted in their efforts by Irish and Celtic missionaries, resulting in the baptism of the Jute king Ethelbert on Christmas Day, 597, along with ten thousand of his subjects. In 627 Edwin of Northumbria was baptized and the Episcopal seat of York established; this was also designated an archbishopric as the Christian population increased in the area.<sup>15</sup> Edwin's death on the battlefield in 633, however, reduced Christian England to the kingdom of Kent.<sup>16</sup> Rome did not lose hope, and over the course of the next fifty years, each English kingdom, beginning with the East Angles and ending with Sussex, saw Christianity take hold.<sup>17</sup>

All was not smooth-going initially. There were divisions between the Roman Christians and the Irish Christians, and those who had come to faith by means of each of these groups, due to their differing customs.<sup>18</sup> The Celts took exception to what they perceived as Augustine's arrogance and authoritarianism, and it is possible they were justified feeling this way given Augustine's ignorance of these people, which probably caused him to behave insensitively.<sup>19</sup> Both of these situations took years to resolve. However, with an Archbishop in both Canterbury and York, and the appointment of twelve diocesan bishops, the Roman pattern had extended to England, and the link between Rome and Britain was established.

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<sup>14</sup> William R. Cannon, History of Christianity in the Middle Ages (Nashville, Tn: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Latourette, p. 346.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, who had been consecrated as archbishop in Gaul, had begun a Benedictine monastery in the capital of Kent: Canterbury. It was here that Augustine established himself, becoming the first Archbishop of Canterbury (ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> Cannon, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Latourette, p. 347.

<sup>19</sup> Cannon, p. 43; Latourette, p. 347.

It is one thing to be under papal control on paper, and quite another in practical terms, especially when both land and sea separate the pontiff from his domain. Britain was at the north-western extreme of the Holy Roman Empire, and, at least from the mid-ninth century, normally ruled by a strong monarch. A certain amount of independence was to be expected, therefore; and the evidence of the historical record is that while there was an acknowledgement of papal authority, the king's authority usually sufficed in matters both secular and ecclesiastical.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, bishops and abbots were consistently among the royal advisors and judges, and as such they were as much servants of the crown as the church.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, British clergy would seek papal permission to conduct foreign missions, and yet Alfred the Great felt no such obligation before requiring heathen Danish kings to submit to Christian baptism.<sup>21</sup> Alfred also took it upon himself to conduct a reform of the church, examining both the morality of her clergy, and the organization of her affairs.<sup>22</sup> In line with his desire to make learning available to everyone, not only did Alfred write and translate works into Old English, but he and others translated portions of the Bible into the English vernacular.<sup>23</sup> Official ecclesiastical endorsement of the monarch came to British shores in the eighth century in the form of the coronation ceremony, and with it the conviction that the king was anointed by God to rule by His grace. By the tenth century, British clergy were making pronouncements regarding the permanent nature of the king's rule, based on the fact that the king was anointed by God for the task.<sup>24</sup> "No one can make himself king," declared Aelfric of Eynsham, an abbot and noted homilist, "but the people has [sic] the choice to

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<sup>20</sup> Carl A. Volz, *The Medieval church: From the Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville, Tn: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 5<sup>th</sup> reprint (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), p.181.

<sup>22</sup> Cannon, p. 103; Douglas Woodruff, *The Life and Times of Alfred the Great* (London, England: Book Club Associates, 1974), pp. 139ff.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon England* (London, England: The Folio Society, 1997), pp. 288-289. On p. 297, Blair provides a sample from the Lindisfarne Gospels where a gloss has been added above the Latin text of Matthew's Gospel rendering the words into Old English.

<sup>24</sup> Whitelock, p. 53.

elect whom they like; but after he is consecrated king, he has authority over the people, and they cannot shake his yoke off their necks.”<sup>25</sup> The Archbishop Wulfstan also considered the expulsion of a king to be a treachery second only to betrayal of the Lord.<sup>26</sup>

One of the means by which the pope could exercise control over a distant territory such as Britain without having to make frequent use of papal legates was by means of the *pallium*. This was a mark of honor given by the pope to an archbishop, and had to be received by the candidate in person. Prior to the Danish invasions of the tenth century, the pallium was sent regularly from Rome to England. From the tenth century onwards, archbishops went to Rome to collect it. While this was a convenience to Rome, it was undertaken at great risk to the Archbishop-elect. King Cnute managed to persuade the pope to relax some of the papal demands in this regard, but the pontiff would not go back to the eighth century arrangement.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that, even with the strong influence of Rome—not only in the pallium, but also in the large number of loyal monks appointed to high ecclesiastical office—it was the king who kept a close eye on the privileges and responsibilities of the priesthood.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Edward the Confessor, though very highly regarded in the church, and certainly no rebel against the pope, was effectively the head of the English church, and exercised an unspoken (and uncontested) right to appoint whomever he desired to bishoprics and to monasteries.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Norman Invasion to John Wyclif*

With the Norman Conquest came a less acquiescent attitude to Rome. William the Conqueror had close personal ties to the pope, and had exercised that influence to gain papal approval for his invasion of England.<sup>30</sup> This, however, did not stop him from

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Peter Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. (London, England: The Folio Society, 1997), pp. 136-7, 172-173.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Maurice Ashley, *The Life and Times of William I*, reprint (London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *Early Medieval England* (London, England: The Folio Society, 1997), p. 59.

taking the English church into his own hands, much as he had the church in Normandy. William spearheaded the reorganization of the church, and, with the trusted Lanfranc as Archbishop of York giving support, resisted papal claims to greater power over the English church.<sup>31</sup> Among his reforms, William asserted royal claims over church affairs by insisting that a) the pope have the king's permission to be recognized in England; b) all excommunications be approved by the king; and c) any church council decrees have the king's sanction before they can take effect.<sup>32</sup>

William II ("Rufus") continued his father's approach toward church affairs. He left in place useful men that his father had appointed to major bishoprics, and filled vacant sees as he saw fit, leaving some vacant—most notably Canterbury—presumably to collect the revenues from these sees for himself.<sup>33</sup> Further, William refused to recognize the pope in England for all but the last five years of his reign.<sup>34</sup>

For nineteen years, from 1135-1154, England was embroiled in a civil war during which the church managed to regain much of its power; but this was to be short-lived. Henry II, first of the Angevin kings, seized control of the crown along with a large swathe of European land, including half of France. With this power, he reinstated much of the church-related legislation that William the Conqueror had imposed. The sixteen articles of the Constitutions of Clarendon are an explicit exertion of royal supremacy. Notable among them are the denial of appeals to Rome without the consent of the king, and the right of the king to try clergy in the king's court.<sup>35</sup> Henry had hoped that by appointing his trusted ally, Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, he would gain valuable assistance in seeing Clarendon enforced by the church. He was mistaken: once Becket took his vows, his allegiance turned from his king to the church. Becket stood up to the king, denying him power over the church. Henry felt betrayed, and in a moment's

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<sup>31</sup> Ashley, *The Life and Times of William I*, pp. 105, 108-113.

<sup>32</sup> Volz, p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Barlow, *William Rufus* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 179, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Volz, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> The full text of the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 can be found online at <http://www.constitution.org/eng/consclar.htm>.

fury uttered words that, taken too literally by nearby soldiers, sent Becket to his grave.<sup>36</sup>

The scandal that ensued wherein Henry was implicated in the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury, led to conciliation between church and state. Both sides compromised and recognized the respective powers of each realm, and all was well—for now.

When Pope Innocent III selected Stephen Langton to be Archbishop of Canterbury, King John refused to accept him and suffered excommunication as a result. It was after the pope placed England under an interdict for five years prohibiting church services anywhere in the land that John finally gave in and put himself under papal authority. During those five years, in 1215, the king grudgingly signed the famous Magna Carta, which not only made the king subject to the rule of law and upheld the right to trial by jury for all people, but also proclaimed the freedom of the English church. Innocent III annulled it and condemned it as dishonoring to the Apostolic See. Both Innocent and John died in 1216, freeing the papal legate Guala to set his seal on the document. Pressure from Louis, a French claimant to the English throne, ensured John's supporters of their endorsement of the charter to make sure succession fell to John's son, Henry.<sup>37</sup>

While Henry III was pleased to pour money into papal projects—for which he suffered a severe backlash from the barons—he was not shy to also assert royal supremacy. Henry considered himself to be God's vicar, the head of his household, with jurisdiction over both laymen and clergymen, and the power to make appointments to church office. When his chief opponent, Bishop Grosseteste of Lincoln, tried to set up an inquisition to examine the lives of the laity, Henry prohibited it as harassment of good Christians.<sup>38</sup>

Edward I (1239-1307), Henry's son and successor, challenged the pope over his rule that clergy were forbidden to pay taxes to the lay ruler. He also resisted foreign papal appointees to English beneficiaries. His Model Parliament included various strata of society, from knights to lay lords, along with ecclesiastical lords, archbishops, bishops

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<sup>36</sup> Clanchy, pp. 90-91.

<sup>37</sup> Volz, p. 108; Clanchy, pp. 140-141.

<sup>38</sup> Clanchy, pp. 161-162.

and abbots, to be sure that church and state had a say in ecclesiastical decision-making.<sup>39</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing sample that English rulers were not averse to standing their ground against the Roman pontiff and the might of the Curia. Royal independence from Rome was not an innovation of the sixteenth century, but had its roots in the English monarchy from the earliest period. Yet none sought a separation from Rome, and indeed, many of the medieval kings were devout churchmen who greatly respected the pope and the authority of the Roman church. One must remember, however, that the reasons for keeping peace with the church were not always clear-cut, and often political expediency trumped theological conviction—assuming there was any such conviction regarding the organization of the church to begin with. For the most part, all that England knew—whether king or countryman—was the Roman Catholic Church. Its institution, ordinances, rituals, and requirements were part of the culture. These factors must be remembered when considering the English Reformation.

#### John Wyclif and the Lollards

It is evident that English kings, while willing to do obeisance to the pope, were reluctant to cede authority to Rome. An Oxford scholar named John Wyclif was known for his defense of the rights of princes over against the papacy, even to the extent of challenging Rome's claim to be the "true" church.<sup>40</sup> He objected to the wealth of the Roman church, declaring that, if the country is at war, "we should seize the clergy's temporal possessions which belong to us and the kingdom as a whole."<sup>41</sup> Wyclif also held to the doctrine of predestination to the point where he believed that no-one in the church, not even the pope, could claim salvation purely on the basis of their works. However, he did not advocate the establishment of a new church, but a reform of the

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<sup>39</sup> Volz, p. 109.

<sup>40</sup> Euan Cameron, The European Reformation (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 74.

<sup>41</sup> Voltz, p. 220.

existing institution. Since the pope's salvation could not be assured, this would have to be directed by the king.<sup>42</sup>

Pope Gregory XI wanted to take action against Wyclif, ordering that he should be arrested and handed over to the Archbishop of Canterbury. But Wyclif had the sympathy of the state and so he was cautioned by the bishops and set free. When Wyclif later started speaking out against the Mass and the doctrine of transubstantiation, he lost important support and found himself on trial by a synod at Blackfriars in 1382. He was found guilty of ten heresies and fourteen errors, but on account of his age (he was probably about sixty years old) and his health, he was released. He died two years later.<sup>43</sup>

Another one of Wyclif's more important teachings, and the one he is probably best known for, is that the Scriptures ought to be translated into the language of the people. This only made sense, since his belief about the need to reform the church was based upon understanding the church and its doctrine as described in Scripture. Wyclif set about translating the Bible into English using the Latin Vulgate, the authoritative version of the text at that time, as the basis of his work. It was a work he did not complete; but the task was completed by his followers.<sup>44</sup>

Up to this point, this study has focused on the attitude of those in authority to the church; with Wyclif's followers the focus turns to the people. Wyclif sent his followers out into the highways and byways to teach the Scriptures and, subsequently, the true nature of salvation and the church. From the 1390s, these "Lollards," as they were unflatteringly called, passed around copies of the Bible translated into English—not by Wyclif, but by two of his disciples. But how effective were they?

There is evidence that King Richard II had Lollard knights in his court, and had rewarded some for their service. This tolerance may be due to an apparent sympathy toward their cause, despite his orthodox outward show. However, this attitude did not last, and the Lollard cause became a victim of bad timing. In 1381 there was a Peasants'

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<sup>42</sup> Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 294-295. Saul points out Wyclif's inconsistency here, since he could not be assured of the king's salvation either. Perhaps it is telling that Wyclif was more prepared to cast aspersions on the state of the pontiff's soul than the king's.

<sup>43</sup> Volz, p. 221.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Revolt, and while there is no evidence of Lollard instigation or leadership, this state of civil unrest caused the authorities to clamp down on whatever could become a threat to the stability of the country—particularly those in power. As a result, heresy became a popular concern for the king, and he strove to exercise his perceived spiritual responsibility for the people by acting to purge the realm of those that would threaten the purity of the church, including the Lollards. For a season, Lollardy went into decline.<sup>45</sup>

While it is clear that Lollardy would not be tolerated among either church or state leadership, a more controversial point is the extent to which this “heresy” was accepted by the people. Modern historians who claim the English people were ready for reform and embraced it when it came will point to the work of the Lollards, especially the spread of their teaching among the people in the years just prior to the Reformation. A. G. Dickens claims that while Lollardy may have gone into decline, there must have been a revival toward the end of the fifteenth century: “From about the year 1490 we hear with ever-increasing frequency of Lollard heretics and official attempts to obliterate the sect.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Christopher Haigh asserts: “Modern scholars have generally admitted that the Lollards were a small minority, and it would be hard to argue otherwise in the face of the overwhelming proofs of the Catholic orthodoxy of the majority.”<sup>47</sup> What is certain is that Lollard beliefs and practices gave encouragement to those seeking theological reform, and from that perspective Lollard influence was important. The extent of its reach, and the number of people that wanted such reform, however is harder to ascertain. The records of Lollard activity may simply represent the activity of a small group of zealous men; or they may well have been numerous and ubiquitous with just a handful of their number making trouble. Peaceful groups of any size do not tend to draw attention to themselves, so the records may not tell the whole story.

### Anticlericalism

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<sup>45</sup> Nigel Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 299-302.

<sup>46</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University Park, Pa: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Haigh, “Introduction,” in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 5.

It is often asserted that one of the main contributing factors to the success of the Protestant Reformation was the rise of anticlericalism in Europe.<sup>48</sup> The term “anticlericalism” is generally used to refer to a feeling of unrest with the institutional church, usually as a result of abuse of power and position by the clergy. The Bishop of London in 1515 is quoted as saying that “a jury of any twelve men in London would condemn any cleric, though he were as innocent as Abel.”<sup>49</sup> One incident that seems to sum up this feeling is known as “the Hunne affair.”

Richard Hunne was a London merchant tailor of good repute, albeit with Lollard sympathies. In 1511 his infant son died, and the rector demanded he hand over the child’s bearing sheet by way of a mortuary fee. Hunne refused since the sheet was actually his and did not belong to the baby. It is possible that the rector had encountered sufficient examples of lay disobedience to want to make an example of Hunne; whatever his reason, he summoned Hunne before a church court where the case was decided against Hunne. Hunne countersued the rector claiming that he had acted against the *Praemunire* Statutes, under which a church court has no jurisdiction over a layman. The case was never settled, and in any case by then the bishop of London had involved himself in the matter, bringing full heresy proceedings against Hunne. His home was searched and among the “heretical” items discovered was a Lollard Bible. Hunne was sent to prison, but did not see a trial: two days later he was found hanging in his cell. The church officials insisted it was suicide, but the coroner’s jury found evidence that Hunne had been strangled before his neck was broken. The guilty parties, the Bishop of London’s chancellor and two of his henchmen, one of whom was the jailer, were indicted, but the church authorities prevented them going to trial. Two weeks later, Hunne’s corpse was burned as that of a heretic, which not only brought disgrace upon his memory, but also resulted in his property being forfeited to the Crown, and his family

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<sup>48</sup> For example, Volz (pp. 226-7): “Lay literacy was accompanied by elements of anti-clericalism brought on by the church’s wealth, the Great Schism, clerical privilege, and higher expectations of those holding the priestly office.”

<sup>49</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 20.

being reduced to poverty. It goes without saying that this whole incident left a bitter taste in the mouths of many in London with regard to the church authorities.<sup>50</sup>

But was this an isolated incident, or did it truly represent a broader pattern of abuse of ecclesiastical authority sufficient to generate widespread anticlericalism? Historian J. J. Scarisbrick points out that the most striking fact about the Hunne affair “was that it was the only really serious case of its kind that the anticlerical lobby of the time could produce and which modern historians have been able to cite.”<sup>51</sup> Scarisbrick goes on to assert that the popular negative image of the medieval church has been greatly exaggerated or misrepresented. The clerical abuses found on the Continent, such as granting jurisdiction (and hence income) of offices to absentees, exploitation of ecclesiastical offices by princes, and the clerical indiscipline and worldliness, were not to be seen—at least to the same extent—in England.<sup>52</sup> The church in England was made up mostly of bishops of modest background, so it had not been “aristocraticized” as much as in Europe.<sup>53</sup> Ecclesiastical authorities in England founded schools, and contributed to the universities; monastic houses gave to the poor.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, there were abuses, but according to Scarisbrick, not at all on the European scale, and not to the extent that would cause rampant anticlericalism:

England basked in this calm, this equilibrium, more than did most countries. The church in England had its defects, moral and structural, but there were plenty of green shoots on the vine. And, above all, there was little sign of lay disenchantment with the ecclesiastical *ancien régime*, no angry alienation, no seething discontent, little expectation that the old order would not, could not and should not endure until the end of time.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ozment, p. 213; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>51</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50-52.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

In response, A. G. Dickens suggests that the only way one can come to such a conclusion regarding anticlericalism in England is to ignore the “voluminous evidence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,” and to start the story with the Hunne affair of 1512.<sup>56</sup> Further, he finds it hard to see how such evidence can be explained away, or limited to just writers and lawyers:

These forces quite certainly existed on a large scale both before and throughout the Reformation-process, though there will doubtless remain legitimate differences of opinion regarding their precise responsibility for the outcome. In truth, to attribute the Reformation wholly or even mainly to anticlericalism would be as irresponsible as to question the latter’s substantial existence.<sup>57</sup>

Dickens points to the growth in urban life and lay education and sophistication in the late medieval period. Lay lawyers began to take on ecclesiastical courts, and local governments wanted to take over the business administration of the churches within their jurisdiction. The writers Langland, Wyclif, and Chaucer wrote works that reflected a negative view of the church and its priesthood, the influence of which is reflected in the number of reprints and imitations of their works that were known to exist in the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Criticism also came in the form of poems, and even sermons and addresses from within the clerical community; Dickens cites Thomas Gascoigne, Dean Colet, and William Melton as examples.<sup>59</sup> He also points out that in the midst of this criticism, there are few, if any, clergymen rising to their own defense. Indeed, even Thomas More wrote demanding reform of the system.<sup>60</sup>

With regard to actual reports of abuse and tension between church and laity, examples can be culled from certain areas, but one cannot cite instances from every location in the country. Indeed, Dickens draws his examples from London,

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<sup>56</sup> Dickens, p. 316.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 317.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 317-318.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

Northamptonshire, and Kent, and none of these rise to the level of the Hunne affair. He admits that anticlericalism was slow to take off in the north and west of England, and was more predominant in towns than rural areas.<sup>61</sup>

Professor Geoffrey Elton lists a number of grievances against the church in England, claiming that “[t]he state of the church was widely believed to be rotten.”<sup>62</sup> He points to tales of “gluttonous monks, lecherous friars, ignorant and dishonest parish priests... [the] oppressive and omnipresent network of ecclesiastical courts,” as well as corrupt lawyers.<sup>63</sup> In general, the picture traditionally painted of the Medieval church in the years just prior to the Reformation is one of a highly litigious, corrupt, and spiritually bankrupt organization that ruled by tyranny. This may have been true, or it may just have been the perception of the people; in either case, the situation was bad enough to generate the displeasure of the population which increasingly clamored for change.

Christopher Haigh, on the other hand, believes that a lot of the evidence normally cited to demonstrate anticlericalism does not hold up to scrutiny, appealing mostly to localized instances of occasional trouble between laity and clergy that cannot be extrapolated out to the country as a whole.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, he goes as far as to say that anticlericalism was more a *result* of the Reformation in England than a cause of it.<sup>65</sup> While there certainly were examples of bad conduct and corrupt morals in both the upper and lower echelons of ecclesiastical authority, for every couple of these there were hundreds of poor parish priests living lives not too far removed from the poor amongst which they served, and as likely to suffer oppression.<sup>66</sup> The works of John Skelton, Jerome Barlow, Simon Fish, and William Tyndale often cited as examples of widespread

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>62</sup> G. R. Elton, Reform and Reformation: England, 1509-1558(Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Haigh, “Anticlericalism and the English Reformation” in Christopher Haigh (ed.), The English Reformation Revised, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

hostility were actually the work of “partisan propagandists advancing a cause.”<sup>67</sup> Haigh points out that Barlow, Fish, and Tyndale were “energetic Lutheran activists,” while Skelton’s poetry was mostly directed against Cardinal Wolsey than the clergy as a whole.<sup>68</sup> He believes it cannot be demonstrated that these writers’ views were widespread, at least within England, and he claims this to be because most people understood that the poor parish priest is more representative of the clergy than Wolsey.<sup>69</sup>

From a legislative perspective, Haigh presents the case that most of the court activity that could in any way be considered “anticlerical” was in reaction to specific instances of clerical action against individuals. In addition to this, the common lawyers, perhaps feeling competition from the ecclesiastical courts, had reason to increase their activity against the church, issuing among other things, *praemunire* writs that challenged the authority of the church to hear contract and defamation cases.<sup>70</sup> It is often thought that the issue of non-payment of tithes, which generated much litigation in the later Middle Ages, demonstrates a widespread anticlerical attitude. Haigh, however, says that these cases were about the interpretation of local customs, and did not have bearing on whether or not the tithe itself was legitimate.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, he points out that resistance to tithing really only became a major issue from the 1540s when inflation caused the value of cash payments to decrease.<sup>72</sup> In conclusion, Haigh says:

The evidence yields cases of special pleading or of localised tension, not examples of a general clash between laity and clergy. Court material shows conflict, and in the nature of things that is what the sources record—but the conflict is isolated, occasional and individual. We may find individual clerics who by negligence or quarrelsomeness fell out with some of their parishoners; we find problems of interpretation of tithing or mortuary custom. But we do not find

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 68.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

enough cases and sufficient evidence of bitterness to justify a general concept of ‘anticlericalism’ in the early sixteenth century.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear that there are various strands of evidence all capable of being interpreted by both sides of the argument. This really only goes to demonstrate how difficult it is to know precisely the thoughts and feelings of the common people toward the clergy in the years leading up to the English Reformation. On the one hand, most people were not composing treatises or filing law suits, so it is hard to know whether those that were engaged in such activity reflected the views of the majority, or if they were trying to influence people’s thinking. On the other hand, because there is no direct documentary evidence of general anticlerical feeling, one cannot take that as evidence that such feeling did not exist. Just because most people did not write against the clergy, it cannot be supposed that they, therefore, either supported the clergy, or were indifferent. While many people gave to the church and at least by their actions seemed to support the church, it is presumptuous to take this as an indication of their loyalty to the existing ecclesiastical structure. Unlike today, there were only two options available for the medieval person: attend church at the local Catholic Church, or do not attend church at all. There were no other churches and hence, for the God-fearing peasant, brought up on Catholic dogma and superstitions about purgatory, penance, and papal power, if he wanted to be right with God he had to give to the church and support the clergy, irrespective of his feelings toward that institution.

One might assume, therefore, that once a legitimate alternative appeared, there would be a mass exodus from the Catholic churches to the new Protestant churches. However, to think this way is to assume that most people would consider the Protestant churches as legitimate, and would have no fear in renouncing the pope and joining the king’s church. It is equally easy to see that a general population in fear of their eternal destiny and ignorant of the theological issues at stake might prefer to hedge their bets and stay with what they know. While most modern revisionist historians seem to paint the average English citizen as a loyal Catholic cajoled into accepting the Reformation, this writer would suggest that few English citizens were Catholic by conviction. That is to

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

say, their Catholicism was one born of nurture and environment, not as a result of catechism and understanding even of the basic tenants of the Catholic church. As much as they were willing to be educated, they could be converted to Protestantism.

Scarbrick claims that there was little anti-papal sentiment in England on the eve of the break with Rome, and rather than objecting to what little papal intervention existed in their lives, the people sought out indulgences and dispensations from Rome.<sup>74</sup> This may well be true, but the fundamental question is not whether the people were willing to accept Catholicism, but *why* they would. Again, there was no alternative. If, as the revisionists claim, Lollardy and other dissenting voices were not numerous and certainly not influential, then for the majority, whether or not they liked the current state of affairs was irrelevant. If they cared for their eternal soul, then they had no choice but to seek indulgences, and papal dispensations, and also give generously in terms of tithing, confession, and anything else Rome would demand. After all, who were they to question the pope, the cardinals, and the theologically educated Curia?

Scarbrick also echoes Haigh's claim regarding anti-clericalism when he states that "anti-papalism was more a consequence than a cause of the Reformation."<sup>75</sup> This is not hard to believe if one accepts the premise that the majority of people knew no other means of salvation than the Roman Catholic Church. First, they would not be versed enough in Scripture to see another approach (especially given the availability of legal copies of the Bible in the vernacular). Also, they would be familiar with what had happened to those that did stand up to the church (e.g., the Lollards), and few would actively desire that, especially if they could not be certain they were right. It is little wonder, therefore, that Protestantism in England took a while to capture the hearts and imaginations of the general population.

And yet, this is to assume that the Protestantism introduced by Henry VIII was based in theological principle, like that of Luther or Calvin. As this paper turns now to examine the nature of Henry's Reformation, it will be argued that, in fact, the major weakness of the English Reformation was precisely that it was *not* based on theological

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<sup>74</sup> Scarbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 57.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

reform, and directly—and quite forcefully—rejected all those who would attempt to bring such reform to the church.

### The Henrician Reformation

The future King Henry VIII was the second son of his father, Henry VII, and as such not expected to reign as king. This honor was to go to his older brother, Arthur. Instead of being coached in the duties of the monarchy, therefore, Henry was given a first-rate education: he is known to have been proficient in Latin and French with some knowledge also of Italian and Spanish, and enough Greek to be fashionable among humanists. He was also instructed in mathematics, astronomy, and, though no great theologian, his grasp of theology was better than that of most monarchs.<sup>76</sup> That great humanist, Erasmus, was himself impressed with the young prince, whose multitude of talents (which included sports and music) made him the quintessential Renaissance royal.<sup>77</sup>

Reading accounts of Henry's achievements, even as a young prince, whether in sports, academics, or music, and taking these along with the reports of his boisterous attitude and apparent charm with women, one is left with the impression of a man with a lot of self-confidence, and perhaps not a little pride. Even in his portraits, the artists seem to capture the image of a man who knows what he wants and expects to achieve it. If this is true, it is an important character trait that will come into play later in his life.

Among the duties Arthur was expected to fulfill as heir to the throne was to seek a marriage that would be politically beneficial to England. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain gave the hand of their younger daughter, Catherine, to Prince Arthur in exchange for English assistance against the French.<sup>78</sup> The unusual union of these two states through this marriage seemed assured, and the wedding took place in November of 1501. However, five short months later, Arthur died, and the Spanish monarchs were reclaiming the extensive (and expensive) dowry they had set forth. It was suggested that

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<sup>76</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors (London, England: The Folio Society, 1997), p. 25.

perhaps Catherine could marry Albert's younger brother Henry, but because she was Henry's sister-in-law, he would need a special dispensation from the pope to marry her. Such a dispensation was not forthcoming immediately, despite claims from Catherine that her union with Arthur was never consummated.<sup>79</sup> Eventually the papal dispensation came, and on June 11, 1509, less than two months after his father's death, Henry and Catherine were married.

It is important to note that, at this time, Henry was fervently Roman Catholic. He had just married a Roman Catholic, and among his loyal advisors were Thomas More and Thomas Wolsey, both ardent defenders of the pope. More was a trained lawyer, and possibly the greatest humanist scholar in England at that time. As such, he was zealous to see church reform, but he was no Luther; in fact he had had sharp exchanges with both Luther and William Tyndale, demonstrating his commitment to the Catholic faith.<sup>80</sup> He accepted Henry VIII's call to be a councilor in 1517,<sup>81</sup> and in 1523 he became speaker of the House of Commons;<sup>82</sup> in six years he would rise to be Chancellor and close advisor to the king.

Thomas Wolsey was a chaplain to Henry VII in the latter years of the king's life, and was promoted to the king's council by Henry VIII. In 1515, Henry managed to persuade Rome to elevate Wolsey to Cardinal, and finally in 1518 he was granted the office of papal legate. This gave him the ability to exercise papal authority over the English church, including the archbishoprics of York and Canterbury.<sup>83</sup> Wolsey was ambitious and power-hungry, and only too willing to take advantage of the opportunities presented to him for glory. He was also aware that his success rested upon his friendship

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<sup>79</sup> S. B. Chrimes, Henry VII (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 284-286; J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 236.

<sup>81</sup> Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 46.

<sup>82</sup> Ralph Keen, "Thomas More" in Carter Lindberg (ed.), The Reformation Theologians (Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 288.

<sup>83</sup> Elton, Reform and Reformation, pp. 48-49.

with the king, and so he made sure that his successes reflected well upon his sovereign.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Scarisbrick suggests Wolsey and Henry had much in common: “both were vigorous, extroverted men, both intelligent, both greedy for the flamboyant and vainglorious.”<sup>85</sup> As chancellor, Wolsey took care of the details of Henry’s administration, making decisions on behalf of the king because the king was either unwilling or unable.<sup>86</sup> For his power, and the way he often wielded it, Wolsey was generally disliked both by nobles and commoners, clergy and laity.<sup>87</sup>

A further indication of Henry’s staunch support of Catholicism is his antipathy toward Martin Luther. When Luther published his Babylonian Captivity of the Church against the papacy in 1520, Henry took the almost unprecedented move of personally publishing a response. His work was called Assertio Septem Sacramentorum adversus Martinum Luterum, or Defense of the Seven Sacraments against Martin Luther, and it upheld the seven sacraments of the church contrary to Luther, who began his work denying all but three and ended up holding only to two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper (the Mass). Henry considered Luther to be a heretic, and he dedicated his volume to pope Leo X. The pope expressed his gratitude by extending to Henry the title *Fidei Defensor*, “Defender of the Faith.”<sup>88</sup>

However, as events would show, Henry’s support of the pope was not limitless, and indeed, extended only so far as it did not infringe upon the will of the king. It has been demonstrated that there is a strong tradition within the English monarchy of acquiescence to the church when it served the political needs of the monarch, and stubborn independence from the church when necessary to accomplish the king’s purpose. This latter situation presented itself to Henry in the form of the succession, and Henry’s strong desire to have a male heir to his throne.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>85</sup> Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>87</sup> Dickens, p. 61.

<sup>88</sup> Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 75; Dickens, p. 116.

This desire was not without foundation. Within the last hundred years, the English throne had seen major conflicts over the succession between Henry VI and Edward IV in 1461, and between Richard III and Henry's father, Henry VII, in 1453. It is only natural that Henry would want to prevent such instability. Catherine had already provided him with a daughter, Mary, but Henry wanted a strong male heir to his throne. Catherine now seemed only capable of miscarrying, and being six years Henry's senior, the chances of her successfully bearing children was rapidly decreasing. Further, Henry had already fallen for Anne Boleyn, daughter of the Earl of Wiltshire, and with whose sister he had already made intimate acquaintance.<sup>89</sup>

More than anything, Henry now wanted to be divorced from his aging queen so he could marry Anne and perhaps through her be granted his son. At first Henry attempted to work within the system. Knowing that the only way he was to obtain a papal dispensation allowing him to divorce Catherine would be to establish it on biblical grounds. His first attempt was to demonstrate that his marriage to Catherine should never have been permitted since, according to Leviticus 20:21, a man must not take his brother's wife. Since the law of God stands opposed to Henry's union with Catherine, he argued, Julius II's dispensation permitting it is invalid, therefore the marriage is null and void.<sup>90</sup>

Henry's case was not a novelty to church canon law, and the very passages of Scripture Henry presented had been discussed for many years prior to this. The fact that there were a variety of opinions within the church as to how Scripture should be applied in this case gave Henry hope. But the fact that some of the sharpest ecclesiastical minds of the time, including Vives, Fisher, and Cajetan, were against him did not bode well.<sup>91</sup> Deuteronomy 25:5 permits a man to take his brother's wife if the brother died childless. While this may seem to contradict the Leviticus passage, it was determined that the

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<sup>89</sup> See Dickens, pp. 126-127, and Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, pp. 147-148, who also notes some of the other extramarital affairs with which Henry VIII has become infamous.

<sup>90</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 163.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-168.

Leviticus rule only applied if the brother had produced offspring, otherwise the man is free to marry his deceased brother's wife.<sup>92</sup>

After much wrangling over Scripture that all eventually came to nothing for Henry, it was Thomas Wolsey whose quick mind stumbled into a possible way out for his king. Catherine had first been informed of Henry's misgivings over their marriage in June of 1527. Her response to this was that Henry's claim to her was sound since she had never "known" Arthur. This would seem to avoid the problem of affinity,<sup>93</sup> but it opened up a legal problem for Catherine known as "public honesty." For Catherine to have legitimately married Henry, Julius would not only have had to sanction Henry's marriage to his late-brother's widow, but he would have had to remove this legal impediment. Since he only did the one and not the other, Julius' dispensation permitting Henry's marriage to Catherine would be void.<sup>94</sup> Henry, however, was not convinced that Catherine had spoken honestly about her relations with his brother, and therefore preferred to pursue other lines of argument of which he was more confident.

Even if Henry's argument for divorce had been unassailable, his faithful Cardinal soon found himself in a very difficult position. Given the fact that Wolsey was the king's chancellor and was by now also a papal legate, Henry expected him to be able to use his authority within the church to prove his loyalty to the crown and get him out of his marriage. Wolsey, on the other hand, liked being papal legate since it afforded him greater power than even the archbishopric of Canterbury; however, only the pope could grant it, and the pope could remove it.<sup>95</sup> At that time, Rome was under the grip of the emperor Charles V, who also happened to be Catherine of Aragon's nephew. The pope could not grant Henry a divorce even if he wanted to.<sup>96</sup>

Henry had already begun to grow suspicious of Wolsey's motives, and had been working behind his back to resolve the situation. But all of the king's scheming came to

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 163, 169-170.

<sup>93</sup> That is, having sexual relations with a too close of a relative.

<sup>94</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>95</sup> Dickens, pp. 61-62; Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 197.

<sup>96</sup> Dickens., p. 127.

nothing, and in the end all Rome would give was a commission to examine the divorce case. There was not even a promise of a verdict, just an examination into the issue. Indeed, the pope and his counselors were amazed that such a fuss was being made over such a trivial issue; Wolsey had the authority as papal legate to try the case himself, so why did he not do that? Yet Henry knew that even if Wolsey's court found in his favor, he had no guarantee the pope would confirm the decision. Such uncertainty was unacceptable to Henry.<sup>97</sup>

After months of petitioning and negotiating, a legatine court was held in Blackfriars in June of 1529 with the commission to pass sentence on Henry's marriage. Catherine had already sent letters to Rome making her case, and she appeared on the first day to inform the court of this, and to protest the whole proceedings. On the next day the court sat, Catherine made an impassioned plea to her husband not to cast her and their daughter aside. After this, she did not appear again; as far as she was concerned, the case was in Rome and the legatine court no longer had jurisdiction.<sup>98</sup> The case for Henry did not go well in the court, and Wolsey's desire to resolve it quickly was thwarted by the end of the legal term and a two month summer break.<sup>99</sup> At the end of the month the court adjourned; it never reconvened. During the recess, papal letters arrived recalling the case to Rome—a direct result of Catherine's appeal.<sup>100</sup> Henry knew that the only chance he had left was to try to persuade the pope to let the case be heard in England. He would spend the next three years trying to pressure Rome to bend to his will, and he did so without Wolsey, whom Henry believed had failed him, and upon whom he rested the blame for the situation.<sup>101</sup> Wolsey was stripped of his office, and probably only spared the further humility of prison on account of his formerly close friendship with the king.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Scarisbrick, pp. 205-207.

<sup>98</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p. 110; Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>99</sup> As a legatine court it was subject to the Roman Rota, and had to keep the court schedule as in Rome.

<sup>100</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p. 110.

<sup>101</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 226; Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 120.

<sup>102</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 120-121.

As Wolsey's successor, the king chose Thomas More. More seemed well qualified for the job: he had been one of the king's counselors, he was chancellor to the Duchy with a proven track record, and he was a lawyer and former Speaker of the Commons, and thus able to relate to both groups in a way Wolsey could not. What was most peculiar about More's appointment to this most trusted position was the fact that, despite his glowing qualifications, he was opposed to Henry's divorce.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps for Henry, More was the only candidate that could fill Wolsey's shoes adequately enough in every other way, and for this he was willing to overlook this one point of rebellion. Nevertheless, one is led to believe that the divorce was one of Henry's most consuming issues at that time, and after Wolsey's failure, it seems incredible that Henry would replace him with someone who would actually fight against him. Scarisbrick says that More's lack of support for Henry's divorce was not outright opposition, but rather an unwillingness to come down on either side. If this is the case, it is possible Henry believed More could be swayed. More initially refused to take the position, but accepted after Henry insisted, saying that he would not burden his conscience with the issue of the divorce and would employ those whose consciences were agreeable to him. More's talents would be utilized elsewhere.<sup>104</sup>

In the meantime, a group of scholars had begun meeting in a tavern called The White Horse, also known as "Little Germany," since the topic of conversation among these scholars was usually Luther and his ideas. The chairman of these meetings was Robert Barnes, prior of the Augustinians, and teacher of classics.<sup>105</sup> Others known to be either considering or professing Lutheran ideas at this time include William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, Thomas Bilney, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, and Matthew Parker. All were resident in Cambridge, and would influence the Reformation in England over the coming years, many giving their lives to the cause.<sup>106</sup> Lutheranism was, not surprisingly, illegal in England, and from 1525, Wolsey turned the heat up on these

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<sup>103</sup> Elton, *Reformation and Reform*, p. 116.

<sup>104</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 236; Elton, *Reformation and Reform*, p. 117.

<sup>105</sup> Dickens, p. 92.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

nascent Reformers. Some were willing to face the fire (quite literally), others went into hiding, and still others fled overseas, particularly to Antwerp.<sup>107</sup> It was there that Tyndale made his home and worked on his translation of the New Testament that eventually found its way back to his native land, and became the basis of the King James Bible.<sup>108</sup> By a twist of irony, some of the Cambridge Lutherans managed to secure teaching posts at Oxford when Wolsey, desperately in need of scholars to fill teaching posts at his new Oxford college, unwittingly hired them.<sup>109</sup>

Thomas Cromwell was in Antwerp well before Wolsey's clamp-down on Lutheranism. He had taken it upon himself in the early 1500s to seek his fortune abroad, and Antwerp was at that time a great, if not the greatest commercial and financial capital in Europe.<sup>110</sup> Not much is known about Cromwell's youth, but it appears he did not receive the traditional education of one whose destiny lies within the royal court. He had no formal legal training, yet acquired enough knowledge of common law to set himself up as an attorney. It is likely that this approach to education led him to develop a frame of mind unlike those schooled within the Catholic system. He was sympathetic to the anticlericalism popular in Europe at the time, and attracted to the ideas of Luther.<sup>111</sup> He became proficient in Latin and gained a great knowledge of Italian literature. One of the books he developed a keen interest in was Marsiglio de Padova's *Defensor Pacis*, a highly controversial work from 1324.<sup>112</sup> The *Defensor Pacis* advocates the separation of church and state, and robs the papacy and ecclesiastical courts of much of their power. Under the system advocated by Marsiglio, the papacy's jurisdiction would be limited to interpreting Scripture and defining dogma; the state would be responsible for keeping the

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<sup>107</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity Volume II: Reformation to the Present* (Peabody, Ma: Prince Press, 2007), p. 799.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>110</sup> Dickens, p. 130.

<sup>111</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 127.

<sup>112</sup> Dickens, p. 130.

peace, and the duly-elected head of government would have a limited army and be responsible to the people.<sup>113</sup>

By the early 1520s, Cromwell was back in England, and had gained sufficient reputation or education (or both) to have Wolsey's trust. Cromwell sat in Parliament and is known to have spoken out against Wolsey's excesses; nevertheless, he soon found himself within Wolsey's household entrusted with the suppression of monasteries in order to finance colleges in Oxford and Ipswich.<sup>114</sup> Wolsey's fall might have made Cromwell fear for himself, given his association with the unpopular Cardinal; however, he was soon appointed burgess for Taunton, and not long after this entered into royal service. He ascended rapidly within the king's palace such that by early 1533 he held the second highest office in the land: Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>115</sup>

Cromwell earned the king's confidence when, in 1532, he came forward with a plan that would both solve the marriage issue, and make a reality of Henry's notions of royal supremacy.<sup>116</sup> Henry had already threatened to work outside of papal jurisdiction back in 1530, and he even invoked the three-centuries-old *privilegium Angliae* which Rome had granted back then. This stated that no Englishman could be cited out of England by papal letters. Henry III and Edward I had both appealed to this rule, and now Henry VIII sought to do the same.<sup>117</sup> Henry also asserted that, as king, he was "not only prince and king, but set on such a pinnacle of dignity that we know no superior on earth."<sup>118</sup> Hence it was an insult to him for his divorce case to be taken away and decided outside of his realm.

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<sup>113</sup> Wikipedia article, "Defensor Pacis" located at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defensor\\_pacis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defensor_pacis). This book evidently had an impact on Cromwell since he financed its first English publication in 1535 and would use its argumentation to support royal supremacy. See Dickens, p. 131.

<sup>114</sup> Dickens, pp. 131-132.

<sup>115</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 302.

<sup>116</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 129.

<sup>117</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 264.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

Henry's mind was already clearly moving toward a radical view of royal supremacy—radical because, while English kings have a tradition of working autonomously and even contrary to the wishes of the pope,<sup>119</sup> the king would never have questioned the pope's ultimate authority, particularly in spiritual matters. Now Henry was asserting his supremacy even beyond the pontiff. In fact, in 1530, Henry commissioned his researchers, who were already busy building the king's case for divorce, to hunt down proof that Henry, on account of his imperial authority, was subject to the pope only in matters of heresy, and also to determine if historically popes have had jurisdiction over divorce cases involving kings or emperors.<sup>120</sup> His researchers could not find the evidence Henry sought—and in fact found evidence to the contrary—but this did not perturb the king. In 1531, Henry amended a clerical grant adding clauses insisting that he be referred to as “protector and only supreme head of the English church,” and saying that he was commissioned with “a cure of souls.” The ecclesiastical convocation to whom this was sent would only pass it by modifying the first clause, adding the phrase “as far as the law of Christ allowed,” and the second by rewording it such that the king cares for the souls entrusted to the clergy.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that Henry saw the church's provenance to be the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments; in these he was willing to submit. However, for Henry the prince has the responsibility to appoint bishops and abbots, to administer clerical goods, to oversee the ecclesiastical courts, and to punish adulterous and insolent clergy.<sup>122</sup> At this point in time, though, all this talk of supremacy, as much as it may reflect Henry's true feelings, did not go much beyond political posturing in an effort to persuade pope Clement VII to grant his divorce.<sup>123</sup>

It is not difficult to see Thomas Cromwell's hand behind the king's parliamentary action during 1531 and 1532, given his experience dealing with the House of Commons.

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<sup>119</sup> See the evidence cited in the first part of this paper.

<sup>120</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 268.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Indeed, Cromwell's name has been associated with the earliest draft of the document known as "The Commons' Supplication against the Ordinaries," dating from 1529. This document was an outright attack on the independence of the church courts, blaming them for discord and heresy within the church. The final version of it was presented to the king in 1532, and giving his assent to it, he passed it on to the church Convocation, hoping for a quick (and positive) response.<sup>124</sup> Convocation had, by chance, just initiated a program of reform that addressed many of the abuses cited in the "Supplication." The response from them was in the form of a plea for the king to protect the English church instead of attacking her. That the king simply encouraged the Commons to continue their offensive, and they were willing to follow the king's encouragement, suggests both the king and the Commons did not really care much for Convocation's reform efforts, no matter how far-reaching they may be. The die was cast.<sup>125</sup>

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1532, Henry presented demands to Convocation that clergy could not enact canons or ordinances without the king's permission, and that all existing canon law must be subject to vetting by royally-appointed commissioners. The following day, Henry met with a Commons deputation to inform them that since the clergy had taken an oath of loyalty to the pope they were only half-subject to the king. He asked them to consider an appropriate course of action, but Convocation did not wait for the verdict. In "the Submission of the Clergy," Convocation agreed to submit to the king, recognizing Henry as the supreme legislator of the church in place of the pope.<sup>126</sup> Thomas More resigned his chancellorship on May 16<sup>th</sup> and returned to being a private citizen.<sup>127</sup> It would take more than one bill to undo centuries of Roman entanglements, but with the passing of this one bill, to all intents and purposes, England had declared independence from Rome and the pope.

In August, 1532, William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, died, providing Henry with the opportunity to settle his divorce case in England with someone he trusted

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<sup>124</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 130; Dickens, pp. 137-8.

<sup>125</sup> Dickens, p. 138.

<sup>126</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 130.

<sup>127</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p. 300.

in this critical post. Although there were many potential candidates, Henry's choice for the job was Thomas Cranmer. Given Cranmer's Lutheran sympathies, one might consider this a strange choice, however a couple of things must be considered. First, while Henry would have objected to his Lutheranism (assuming he was even aware of it), more importantly Henry could trust that Cranmer was no papalist and was unlikely to support Rome. Second, according to Henry, it was Anne Boleyn—herself a Protestant with Lutheran leanings<sup>128</sup>—who suggested Cranmer to the king. At the time of his selection, Cranmer was an archdeacon on embassy in Charles V's court. Cromwell hastily summoned him back to England to fill the vacant see.<sup>129</sup> It might also appear odd that despite the adoption of the "Supplication" by Convocation, Henry requested the necessary bulls from pope Clement, giving papal sanction to his nominee for archbishop. One explanation for this move would be to ensure that there would be no doubt concerning the legality of Cranmer's appointment, even among Roman Catholics. Further there would be no question of Cranmer's authority to pronounce on the king's marital estate when the time came.<sup>130</sup> Clement, possibly unaware of the changed circumstances in England, granted the bulls. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1533, Cranmer took the traditional oath at his consecration to obey the pope—but not before he had issued a private protest saying that whatever oath he made would be illegitimate if it contradicted the laws of God, his obedience to the king, or the laws of England, effectively nullifying his papal oath.<sup>131</sup>

Earlier in the year, Anne found herself pregnant with Henry's child. To ensure the legitimacy of this future heir to the throne, they were married in secret on January 25<sup>th</sup>. In May, thanks to Cromwell's lobbying, Convocation set forth two propositions. The first stated that since Catherine of Aragon had consummated her marriage to Arthur, the pope could not permit her marriage to Henry. The second asserted that the

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<sup>128</sup> MacCulloch points out that Anne was "a vigorous and well-informed patron of the evangelical cause" (MacCulloch, p. 200).

<sup>129</sup> Elton, *Reformation and Reform*, p. 175.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* Elton does not draw this conclusion, but his comments regarding Henry's actions suggest this as a plausible motive.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-6.

consummation of Catherine's marriage had been proven beyond doubt. The newly-minted Archbishop of Canterbury heard the suit, and by the end of the month was able to give the king the marriage annulment he had long wanted. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, Anne Boleyn was crowned queen consort, and in September, Princess Elizabeth was born.<sup>132</sup>

It was now that the process of severing ties from Rome could begin in earnest, though Henry wanted pope Clement to admit wrongdoing and concede to Henry victory. Perhaps Henry was finding it hard to believe the magnitude of what he had done and needed to hear this from the pope to make it seem real. Or maybe it was just Henry's pride wanting to revel in his success. Nevertheless, Rome's response, delivered on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1533, was to condemn Henry's actions and give him until September to reconcile with Catherine or suffer excommunication. Of course, for Henry there was no going back. Late in 1533, he published a work entitled Articles devised by the holle consent of the King's Council, etc., justifying his actions in light of the excommunication. Along with providing evidence that the case belonged in England, he denounced the pope and exhorted the people to ignore any counter-reaction from Rome.<sup>133</sup>

A series of acts in 1534 put forward by Cromwell and approved by Henry finally cut ties to Rome. First, the act in Conditional Restraint of Annates drastically reduced the amount of tax money going to Rome.<sup>134</sup> The act of Dispensations declared that all ecclesiastical dispensations were to come from England and not Rome.<sup>135</sup> The act of Succession not only secured the future of the crown to Henry's children by Anne, but required the swearing of an oath throughout the realm declaring Henry's marriage to Anne lawful, along with all offspring proceeding from that union.<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that by implication, Mary, Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon, was excluded from the royal succession. Elton states that the majority willingly swore the oath, though

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<sup>132</sup> Dickens, p. 141.

<sup>133</sup> Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, pp. 317, 323.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*; Elton, Reformation and Reform, p. 185.

whether out of fear or out of genuine agreement one cannot be certain.<sup>137</sup> Among those refusing however, was Thomas More. More held firm to his convictions and ended up in the Tower where he was eventually executed, despite the efforts of Cranmer and Cromwell to save him.<sup>138</sup> The act in Absolute Restraint of Annates stopped all payments for benefices to Rome. The Heresy act declared it no longer a crime to deny papal primacy, and the act for the Submission of the Clergy formalized the Convocation's declaration of submission to the king from May of 1532.<sup>139</sup> Finally, the act of Supremacy declared Henry to be the earthly head of the English church, adding the title "Supreme Head of the Church of England" to his style in January of 1535.<sup>140</sup>

In his new capacity as head of the church, the king bestowed on Cromwell the title "Vice-Gerant in Spirituals." This gave Cromwell essentially the same powers over the church as a papal legate; he now had Wolsey's old ecclesiastical position, only under new management. He was now responsible for conducting the affairs of the church, as well as looking after royal business.<sup>141</sup>

Cardinal Wolsey had left the crown in financially bad shape, between building programs, wars, and other expenditures. The financial costs involved with establishing the divorce and the royal supremacy only added to the situation. The crown needed money, and after Henry's split with Rome, the number of resources he could count on for funds diminished.<sup>142</sup> Cromwell decided to use his new powers and tap the church for the royal coffers—paying particular attention to the monasteries and the orders (e.g., Franciscans, Dominicans, etc.). In January of 1535, Cromwell commissioned a survey of ecclesiastical holdings, and sent out visitors with questionnaires to check the spiritual condition of each institution. The results of the visitations revealed sufficient scandal and mismanagement to justify the next stage of Cromwell's plan. He first struck out at the

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<sup>137</sup> Elton, Reformation and Reform, p. 185.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-6; Elton, England under the Tudors, p. 138.

<sup>139</sup> Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 324.

<sup>140</sup> Elton, England under the Tudors, p. 136.

<sup>141</sup> MacCulloch, p. 300.

<sup>142</sup> Elton, England under the Tudors, p. 142.

small monasteries, evaluated as those with an income less than £200 per year

(somehow these were deemed more corrupt than the more prosperous monasteries).

These institutions were dissolved, their assets assessed, and their incumbents pensioned off or dispatched to vicarages or other benefices as they so desired.<sup>143</sup> Those monasteries that remained after 1536 did not stand for more than a few more years. Over the period from 1538 to 1540, the remaining monasteries, along with abbeys, and friaries were dissolved, increasing the crown's income by over £100,000 per year.<sup>144</sup>

Many questions surround the importance and meaning of the dissolution of the monasteries. Scarisbrick considers this to be “the capital event” since it “affected daily life more deeply and widely than did the breach with Rome and was more difficult to repair.”<sup>145</sup> To him this was a sign that England, once a land of beautifully-crafted abbeys and pious monks, had rejected its past and destroyed that which was sacrosanct. Elton, on the other hand, while recognizing the dissolution as important and with notable consequences, says that it “does not really merit the central position commonly allocated to it. In some ways it was the least revolutionary part of the revolution...”<sup>146</sup> Three reasons may be discerned from his explanation. First, attacks upon the monasteries were not a Reformation novelty; indeed, Wolsey himself had seen to the suppression of some monasteries while papal legate.<sup>147</sup> Second, the monasteries and orders were not as pervasive as the regular churches, and were mostly self-governing. There was a strong papal loyalty with many of them, such that the most zealous resistance to royal supremacy came from the orders. However, they were not the majority report. Third, Elton believes that monasticism in England was on the decline in any case. The amount of corruption within had robbed them of meaning, and also left them subject to the derision of the laity. Many monks were looking to get out—and indeed would take advantage of Cromwell's offer at the dissolution.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 148; MacCulloch, pp. 200-1.

<sup>145</sup> Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 68.

<sup>146</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, p. 140.

<sup>147</sup> See above, and also Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p. 236.

Scarlsbrick counters this view of the monasteries contending that while they certainly had lost prestige with the people, this is not the same as saying they had completely lost their respect. “It was not an ‘avenging’ laity which precipitated its downfall.”<sup>148</sup> He notes that, unlike elsewhere, there were no recorded instances of pent-up violence being unleashed against monks or nuns, or of mobs looting vacated houses. In fact, he points out that what violence there was tended to be from people taking out their anger on the commissioners doing the work of dissolution.<sup>149</sup>

It is the view of this writer that, while the dissolution of the monasteries was clearly a landmark event in the English Reformation, it cannot overshadow the establishment of the royal supremacy, since it was that which made the fall of the monasteries possible. However, by ridding the land of the monasteries and orders, Cromwell effectively erased the last vestiges of the old religion from the land, and, he hoped, any possibility of resistance. While it is tempting to see this as a primary motive for the dissolution, one must not overlook the need for Henry to maintain military strength and minimize indebtedness to foreign powers, especially since his schism from Rome. He also needed stable government, and all of these things required a steady cash-flow. This is precisely what the monasteries could provide.<sup>150</sup>

The most widely documented popular reaction to the dissolution of the monasteries was not positive—at least for the king. It is likely, at least in this writer’s estimation, that the initial motive for dissolving the monasteries was primarily financial. However, the second wave of dissolutions starting in 1538 was almost certainly precipitated by the events of 1536-7, known as “The Pilgrimage of Grace.” This was an uprising in the north of the country—which still predominantly favored the old religious order—in light of various old grievances to do with enclosures and rents, but triggered by royal interference with religion, in particular the dissolution of the monasteries, which were more numerous in that part of the land.<sup>151</sup> The first rebellion was not a very

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<sup>148</sup> Scarlsbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 69.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>150</sup> See Dickens, pp. 167-9.

<sup>151</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, pp. 144-5.

dignified affair led by “Captain Cobbler” and was directed mainly at an unpopular bishop and a collector of the royal subsidy.<sup>152</sup> They were spurred on by rumors that the king intended to dissolve parish churches, confiscate their gold, and ban them from eating white bread, pigs, and capons without a license.<sup>153</sup> The king refused to listen to their demands and the rebellion collapsed. However, a more significant insurgency led by Robert Aske, a religious idealist, took hold not long after this in Yorkshire. Aske assembled a large and well-organized army that posed a significant challenge to the king's troops that rode against it. These men objected to the dissolution of the monasteries because, according to Aske, they feared that the monks would be succeeded by non-resident landlords who would take money away from the region.<sup>154</sup> Aske's men rode under a banner with the five wounds of Christ, signifying plainly that this was a religious cause. He took York and established a base there while the king's men were still pulling together a response. The Duke of Norfolk eventually met with Aske and promised to make his demands known to the king. This was in part a delay tactic, and Henry played along delivering a response that continued the stay of hostilities, buying Norfolk time to gather his troops. The demands of the insurgents, as communicated a second time on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, included the end of action against the monasteries, Cromwell's dismissal and punishment, and the restoration of papal rule. Norfolk met with Aske on December 6<sup>th</sup> and promised adherence to some of the demands and a full pardon to all the rebels. Aske stood down, pledged allegiance to the king, and disbursed his army.<sup>155</sup>

It is unlikely that Henry intended to keep any promise made to insurgents under pressure, and small outbreaks of trouble in January and February of 1537 provided him with the excuse he needed to renege on his agreement. The northern rebels were tried and executed. Henry's vengeance was played out both in the approximately 200 men

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<sup>152</sup> Dickens, p. 147.

<sup>153</sup> Elton, England under the Tudors, p. 145.

<sup>154</sup> Dickens, p. 148.

<sup>155</sup> Elton, England under the Tudors, p. 146.

whose bodies were left hanging across the northern counties as a grim warning, and in the dissolution of the rest of the monasteries and orders.<sup>156</sup>

Was the Pilgrimage of Grace a religious or secular uprising? This question is important because it speaks to whether or not the general public embraced or rejected the Reformation. Dickens is fairly adamant: "... viewed as a whole, the Pilgrimage cannot for a moment be fairly summarized as a devout crusade to save the rights of Holy church, to re-edify the monasteries, to overthrow low-born heretics, to restore England to a papalist Christendom."<sup>157</sup> He goes on to insist that the movement's roots were economic and its demands purely secular.

Scarisbrick, on the other hand, states that the Pilgrimage of Grace was

a protest against change, a conservative rebellion, a desperate attempt to restore what had been pulled down and protect what still stood. It was 'religious' in the widest sense of the word, that is, it was a protest on behalf of the old religion (above all in defence of the monasteries), though the reasons for clinging to the old ways may well have ranged from the highest and most unworldly to the most profane.<sup>158</sup>

This view is echoed by D. M. Pallister noting that John Hales and Robert Parkyn, contemporaries of the event but on "opposite sides of the religious fence," both concur that the cause of the uprising was the Crown's religious policies and the suppression of the monasteries.<sup>159</sup>

Given the circumstances of the revolt, it is hard to dismiss the idea that at least the revolt led by Ashe was in some way provoked by royal religious policy. At this distance in time it is hard to read motives; all one has to go on are the events themselves and the testimonies of those present. From these, it appears that the Pilgrimage of Grace was a storm that had been brewing for a while, stirred up by a number of grievances both

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp. 146-7; Dickens, pp. 149-50.

<sup>157</sup> Dickens, p. 150.

<sup>158</sup> Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 82.

<sup>159</sup> D. M. Pallister, "Popular Reactions to the Reformation," in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised*, p. 96.

political and religious. It is perhaps that the dissolution of the monasteries, especially in the more conservative north, was the final straw—especially since it involved the direct intrusion of the king’s men into the affairs of the church. Their list of grievances, if granted, would have restored the church to her pre-1529 situation with the pope ruling and the king his loyal subject. However, it is noteworthy that the king did not promise to address all of their concerns, and the rebels themselves, due to the disparity in their education and social standing, were divided over, for example, the issue of king’s supremacy over the church.<sup>160</sup>

Perhaps it is better to see the Pilgrimage, therefore, as a northern revolt against various religious and secular abuses, with the banner of religion binding a wide-ranging group of rebels under a common theme, namely their religious conservatism. That this uprising was unique to that particular part of the country is noteworthy; as is the fact that they were ready to submit to the king when he promised to address some of their grievances. This writer would suggest that this indicates a group of people who more than anything wanted to be heard. They objected to the amount of change, but in the end were willing to submit. This is not the religious conviction of Martin Luther, or William Tyndale; these were not die-hard Catholics, but people who, aside from their agrarian complaints, were used to their religious tradition and feared change.<sup>161</sup>

Now that Henry had taken the final step and severed ties with Rome, the English Reformation was in place. Cromwell’s program of reorganization was underway with the king’s blessing. The king now sat in place of the pope, exercising both the papal power of *potestas jurisdictionis*, and *potestas ordinis*. The first Henry embraced fully, since this referred to his rule over the temporal affairs of the church—i.e., taxation, administration, appointment of officers, and control of her laws and courts. The second Henry only partly fulfilled since these referred to the spiritual functions of the church, and hence would have included the administration of sacraments. The king was not a priest and

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<sup>160</sup> Dickens, p. 149.

<sup>161</sup> MacCulloch characterizes the Pilgrimage as being in large part “a cry of anguish” at Cromwell’s process of reform (MacCulloch, The Reformation, p. 201).

never claimed to be one; however, he did retain the right to determine doctrine and ritual, so he did exercise this power to some extent.<sup>162</sup>

It is interesting to note that a prominent feature of the Reformation, wherever it took hold, was the propagation of the Scriptures in the vernacular. Copies of the Bible in English had been around since the days of Wyclif, however these had been suppressed in favor of the official Latin Vulgate translation. In 1535, Miles Coverdale, the English Lutheran in exile, produced his translation of the Bible into English. It was based on the Greek New Testament, the literal Latin rendering of the Old Testament (his Hebrew was weak), and Luther's German.<sup>163</sup> Cromwell was persuaded to have Coverdale's Bible published in England, which he did with the king's consent. In 1536, Cromwell issued injunctions ordering that copies of the Bible in English and Latin should be placed in the choir of every church for all men to read.<sup>164</sup> In 1537, Cranmer presented to Cromwell a copy of Matthew's Bible, a translation done by John Rogers in Antwerp under the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew. Rogers had a better grasp of Hebrew than Coverdale, and Cromwell obtained the king's permission for this version also to be sold throughout the country. The fact that Rogers had worked with both Tyndale and Coverdale, and was associated with German Lutherans was either unknown to Henry, or he did not care.<sup>165</sup> In 1539, the Great Bible was published. This edition was Cromwell's project which he had entrusted to Coverdale, who had returned to England at Cromwell's request.<sup>166</sup> The publication and free distribution and sale of the English Bible further testify to the power and influence of Cromwell at this time. This also indicates the seeming ambivalence of the king to the work of apparent Lutherans. Again, he may not have been aware of their religious persuasion, but that seems unlikely. Indeed, at this point one might begin to wonder exactly what it was that Henry objected to about Lutheranism.

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<sup>162</sup> Elton, *England under the Tudors*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>163</sup> Dickens, p. 152.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155.

In the newly-Reformed England many Protestant works were being published and sold in England, including books by Barnes, Coverdale, Becon, Taverner, and even Luther and Calvin.<sup>167</sup> The first doctrinal statement issued under the new Head of the church was released by Convocation in July 1536. The “Ten Articles,” while somewhat conservative in tone, have a distinctly Lutheran flavor to them. They allowed for the use of ceremony, images, prayers to the saints, and so forth, at least to some degree. However, they also affirm only three sacraments (baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and penance), make statements that allude to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and appeal to Scripture on subjects such as the destiny of the souls of the dead, implicitly denying purgatory.<sup>168</sup> It must be admitted, however, that the language of the Articles does not outright condemn Catholic doctrine, and it is perhaps in light of England’s need to ally with the German Lutheran princes in the face of a potential war against Charles V and Francis I that the Articles are rendered in an apparently pro-Lutheran manner.<sup>169</sup>

Whatever the Ten Articles might have appeared to say, it is clear that Henry’s conservatism was still in place. In 1537, The Bishop’s Book, or The Institution of a Christian Man was published. This was an exposition of the creed, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ave Maria.<sup>170</sup> Its tone was decidedly more pro-Catholic than the Ten Articles had been, omitting none of the traditional Roman seven sacraments, for example. Henry offered a revision of the work in 1538, and Cranmer returned it with his corrections and criticisms.<sup>171</sup>

Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn had failed to produce a male heir, and the woman who had helped bring about the English Reformation found herself the victim of a smear campaign (which may have had some truth to it), and executed for adultery on May 19, 1536. Henry’s new love interest, Jane Seymour became his wife on May 30<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>167</sup> Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 399.

<sup>168</sup> Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 257.

<sup>169</sup> Dickens, p. 199.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

and she bore him his long-awaited son and heir, Edward, in October of 1537. Jane died only twelve days later.<sup>172</sup>

In 1539, Cromwell, continuing to find a way to establish a strong alliance with the Lutheran princes, arranged a marriage treaty between the king and Anne of Cleves. Henry could not have been more disappointed by the plain-looking, monolingual<sup>173</sup> woman with whom he had been contracted to spend his remaining days. He reluctantly married Anne in January of 1540, but refused to consummate the marriage. Henry demanded that Cromwell get him out of the union, as he had done with Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. While it would be relatively easy to dissolve an unconsummated marriage, Cromwell realized he had made a major miscalculation at a time in his career when he needed to maintain the king's good favor. His popularity at court was waning, and indications were that the French would be favorably disposed to the king if Cromwell was dispensed with.<sup>174</sup>

In April of 1539, at the opening of the new Parliament, Henry assembled a committee consisting of four Reformers and four Catholics, with Cromwell presiding. In May he presented to this committee six articles for discussion, framed as questions—though it was clear they were rhetorical.<sup>175</sup> The six questions were intended to address transubstantiation, the taking of communion in both kinds by the laity, vows of chastity, private masses, clerical marriage, and confession. The answers to the questions were intended to affirm the traditional responses.<sup>176</sup> Despite the protest of the Protestants, the Act of Six Articles was passed as a penal act—i.e., their breach was punishable under law, even by burning. Cromwell and Cranmer had opposed the articles, but nevertheless submitted to the king's authority.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, pp. 348-353.

<sup>173</sup> And unfortunately, that language was German.

<sup>174</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, pp. 288-289.

<sup>175</sup> Dickens, p. 201.

<sup>176</sup> Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p. 287.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Perhaps Cromwell should have seen the writing on the wall, but nevertheless he persisted in his plan for Reformation. However, he was soon overtaken by the pro-Catholic faction of the court who managed to convince Henry that Cromwell was guilty of heresy and treason.<sup>178</sup> Without knowing the specific charges leveled against Cromwell, but knowing Cromwell's predisposition toward Lutheran ideas, it is not hard to see how a case could be made against him. And in light of the Act of Six Articles, it would be easy to catch him in a treasonable offense. He was executed on July 28, 1540.

Henry would live another seven years, during which time he would marry twice more, to Catherine Howard, and finally Catherine Parr. He would have no further children, and his only son, Edward was, by the Act of Succession (1536), heir to his throne. His two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, were both deemed illegitimate due to the statuses of their mothers (Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry was annulled, and Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn was executed as an adulteress), and hence denied succession to the throne, at least for now.

### Conclusion

The Henrician Reformation certainly did not follow the model of the European Reformations. In the first section, this paper established a long tradition of English royal independence from Rome, so the fact that Henry would stand his ground against the pope was not a novelty. The fact that Henry would go so far as to actually commit to a permanent breach with Rome was unheard of; prior to this time, the king would usually reconcile with the pontiff, or find some way to acquiesce to his demands. Why was Henry different? Was it religious conviction that gave him the resolve he needed to break with the pope?

It seems clear to this writer that Henry's religious convictions were never that solid. He was certainly theologically aware, but there is a difference between theological awareness and theological conviction; that is, the difference between knowing what the issues are, and actually taking a stand for what one believes is correct. Henry seemed to understand the theological issues between Protestants and Catholics, but his convictions

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<sup>178</sup> Dickens, p. 202.

were more political than theological. Ultimately, Henry wanted a divorce from his aging wife so he could re-marry, with the hope that a new wife would bear him a son and secure the succession. It is hard to find any other compelling motive in Henry for the actions he took, and whatever theological reasons he put forward, they were born out of his desire to fulfill this political goal, not because he desired to do what was biblically correct.

As further evidence of this, one could look at his willingness to utilize Protestants and Protestant argumentation to establish himself as Head of the Church of England, compared to his promulgation of the Act of Six Articles. Putting the two of these together, one gets the picture of a king whose complaint was not so much with Catholic theology, but with the head of the Catholic Church. In the end, Henry could abide images, clerical celibacy, purgatory, and all the other distinctive Catholic doctrines, as long as he was in charge and not dependent on a higher authority.<sup>179</sup>

This was, perhaps, Cromwell's downfall: he misunderstood the king's intentions and pushed for reforms that the king was not really behind. The king supported the dissolution of the monasteries at first because it supplied him with much needed income, and then as payback against those who dared to rebel against his authority. In the end, however, Henry was a conservative; and perhaps he always was. Yet he allowed Cranmer to select for his son, the future King Edward VI, tutors and guardians that would raise him with Erasmian and Protestant values. At a young age, Edward wrote "a long and competent treatise" on the pope as Antichrist.<sup>180</sup> One might be encouraged by this to find in Henry a deeper affection for Protestantism such that he would want his son to be thus raised. It is perhaps more realistic to see in this a king who knows that the only way to be assured that the pope would stay out of English affairs would be to have an heir to the throne as anti-papal as he was. Henry probably did not want to see the English church reformed along the lines of Zurich, Geneva, or Wittenberg, but maybe he was willing to take that risk for the sake of royal supremacy.

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<sup>179</sup> Naturally, Henry claimed his authority to rule as king and head of the church came from God; how much Henry truly submitted to his Master is open for debate.

<sup>180</sup> Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 14.

This paper has also been concerned with the popular reaction to the English Reformation. Was this something the people wanted, or was the rebellion of The Pilgrimage of Grace an expression of the general feeling of the populous? Again, it is hard to be certain, but the facts laid out in this paper suggest that for the most part the people were as theologically indifferent as their king. They were comfortable with Catholicism because it was all they knew, and when that was taken away, the immediate reaction—especially among the theologically ignorant—was fear. These people had been brought up on the understanding that forgiveness of sin and eternal life were dependent upon their relationship with the Church, and the various sacraments thereof. When that was removed, where could they turn to be assured of salvation? It would take more than just an imposed reform from above to secure the hearts and minds of the people. This is, perhaps, why it took so long for ecclesiastical reformation to take hold in England.

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